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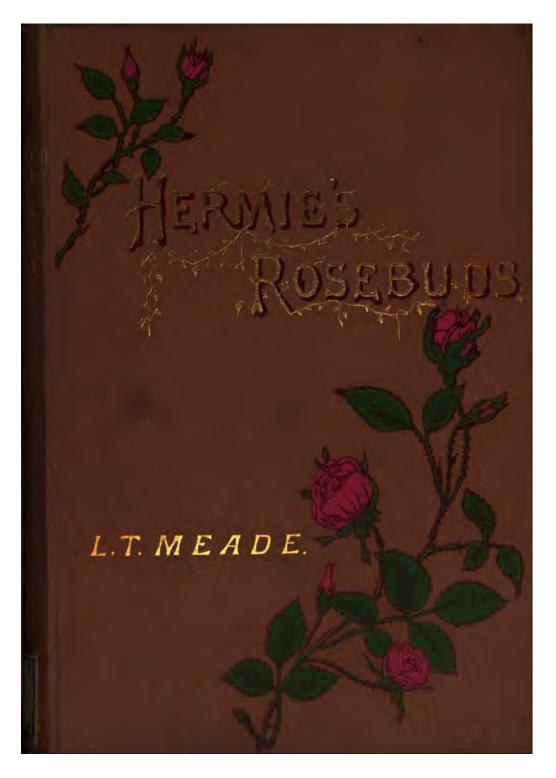
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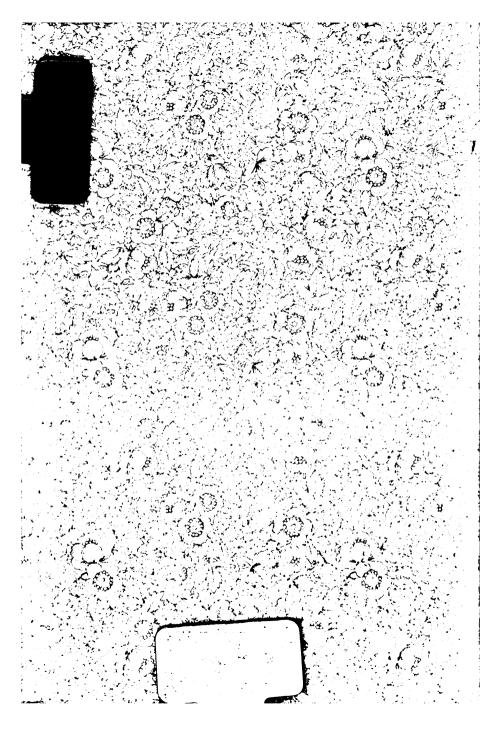
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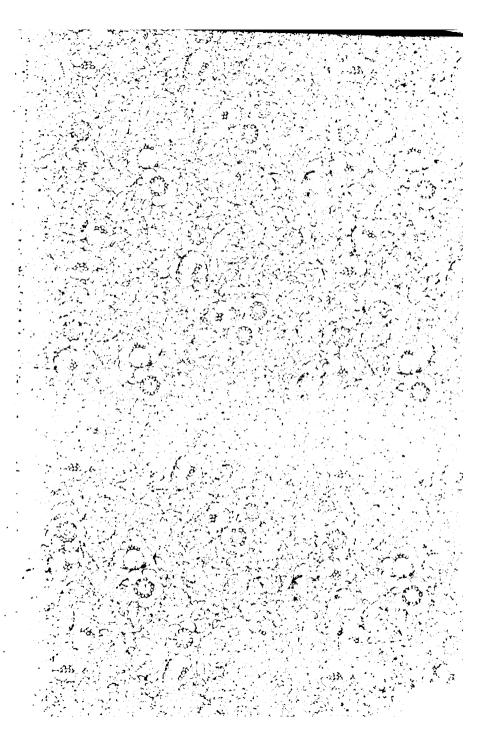
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HERMIE'S ROSE-BUDS:

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

L. T. MEADE,

AUTHOR OF "SCAMP AND I," "WATER GIPSIES,"
"HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND," ETC.

Fondon :

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,

27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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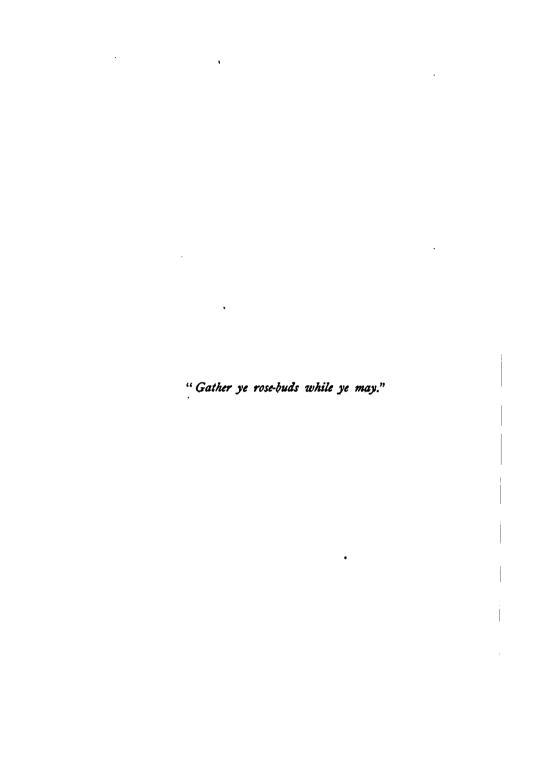
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HERMIE'S ROSE-BUDS.



CHAPTER 1.

Two very large tears stood in two blue eyes. The eyes were set in a round face, the face surmounted a pair of square shoulders; the shoulders were on a stout and sturdy frame, the very well-developed frame of a little boy of between six and seven years of age. He was standing quite still, with his eyes very wide open indeed-not for worlds would he blink them, for then the full bright tear-drops would overflow, and that would mean crying. for any amount of grief would Hermie suppose himself capable of crying. He had a horror of the very thought. No; he stood quite still and kept his eyes painfully wide open. Tear-drops in the eyes were one thing, but tears raining down the cheeks were quite another. even single tears don't visit bright blue eyes at so tender an age for nothing. There was a

cause for those full drops, and the cause lay at Hermie's feet. At his feet lay a little pot, a broken flower-pot, and by the side of the pot a flower, broken off at the roots. It was utterly and hopelessly broken off, and now lay on its side, its pretty buds crushed and trodden on, as though some careless foot had stepped over it. This was the story of the flower-pot and the flower; a very simple story, and in telling it I must mix up some of Hermie's own little life history.

Hermie was not born in close and foggy London. He was a country boy, brought up with country tastes. His father was a gardener, and had long trained the little man to love When between four and five years flowers. old, Hermie had found himself the happy possessor of a little garden of his own. It was quite a wonderful garden for such a little boy to have, for the flowers had all roots, and Hermie was not so impatient as to pull them up now and then to see how they were growing. His father, too, during that first happy summer when he really understood flowers, had planted a pretty bright blue annual in his garden in so skilful a fashion that when it grew



"At his feet lay a little pot, and by the side a flower broken off at the roots."

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up, and came into blossom, it spelt "Hermie." How Hermie did love that beautiful blue "Hermie" in his own little garden! But then came changes. The pretty garden, the blue flowers, all the dear fresh country things had to be said good-bye to, for his father and mother, for some reason which he could not understand, were obliged to leave their nice cottage far away from any town and come to live in London. They came to live in a very close and poor and ugly part of London, and instead of having a sweet and pretty cottage to themselves, they were obliged to put up with two rooms, and these rooms were very little better than attics. Hermie did not like London at all. He said over and over again that it was an ugly, ugly place, and certainly it looked so to the poor little fellow, for the really lovely parks and all the gay and beautiful things which are to be found for the rich in London, were far out of his reach. His father and mother were much poorer than when they lived so happily in the country; and as he had no brothers and sisters, and his mother did not want him to learn bad language from the neglected and ignorant little children all around, she was obliged to keep him indoors, and indoors meant a very dull life indeed for Hermie.

He would stand patiently at the window, with his little face pressed against the pane, and think longingly of his happy country home, of his sweet garden, and all the beautiful things he must never see again. This constant fretting and musing, and, above all, the absence of fresh air, were very bad for his health. His cheeks lost their roses, and his eyes were much less bright, and, in consequence, less blue than when he lived in the country.

His father and mother grew anxious about him, for he was their only little child; and, though they were both very, very busy, trying hard to earn enough money to live, they did what they could for him. His father was obliged to be out all day, but his mother would often lay aside some fancy needlework she was doing for the shops, and taking her little boy's hand, would take him out and walk as far with him as possible, and try to reach one of the parks, so that he might have a sight of something green. But neither Hermie nor his mother was very strong, and it so happened that the house where their rooms were was a

good distance from all the parks, so they very seldom accomplished this feat, though whenever they did, they were both of them in great delight.

One day, after their slow and dull little walk through the hot and crowded streets, Hermie said to his mother, as they were mounting the stairs on their way home—

"I'm so dreadful dull, and there's a little boy standing there. He's about as big as me, and he has marbles in his pocket. I saw 'em—such a lot! May I stay and play with that little boy, mother?"

But his mother, looking back and seeing that the boy Hermie alluded to was dirty, uncared for, and not possessed of a very good countenance, was obliged to refuse.

She did this very sorrowfully, and said, "I am so sorry for you, my poor darling."

But Hermie was a good and patient little fellow, and when he saw the tears in his mother's eyes he said nothing more, though many and many times he cast wistful glances at the boy about his own age who owned the marbles.

Mrs. Penfold, however—for that was his mo-

ther's name—thought much about the very natural wish of her little son, and one evening she consulted her husband on the subject.

"It's just this, James," she said; "the little man is pining for some natural amusements. I wish we had a companion for him. I wish there were some nice children about."

"The children here are not brought up like him," answered the father. "They has no one to help 'em, or show 'em how to live better. They uses bad language, which would jest frighten our little Hermie. No, wife, he must not make friends with the little street children; he's too young to do 'em any good, and they'd only teach him words as 'ud frighten him, poor lamb."

The mother sighed.

"I know well as ye're right," she said to her husband; "but for all that our dear little one is growing dreadful thin and pale. It breaks my heart to see him so."

"Well, wife, we'll jest hope and pray that I'll soon get regular employment, and then we'll move into a better part of the town, and have nice rooms, and there'll be a more respectable class of children about, and Hermie can have

companions; but it can't only be the want of companions," he added, "for he had none when he lived in the country, and I'm sure a finer or healthier boy you couldn't see than he was when we lived there."

"You forget that he had flowers there," answered the wife. "Flowers and fresh air—why that little bit of a garden was jest the great joy of our little one's life."

"Flowers! and can't he have a flower here?" answered the father.

"Oh, James dear, you know he never even sees a flower in this house. I never saw a little child so taken with 'em; 'tis his one delight when we are out to try and find some shop where they sells them, and get me to go there; it fairly makes my heart ache to see how he looks inter the shop windows—but he never sees a flower at home."

"And a flower 'ud be a sort of companion to him," said Penfold. "Well, wife, he shall have one. Don't say anything about it; but however poor we are, he shall have a living flower in a pot by this time to-morrow."

The result of this conversation was that Penfold got up very early indeed on the following morning; quite in the dusk of the soft autumn day he stole away, and without either Hermie or his mother guessing anything about it, visited Covent Garden. There he spent a shilling—which shilling was meant to buy his own dinner for at least two days—in a dear little rose-tree for Hermie. One rose on the little tree was in blossom, another in full bud, and there were several other little undeveloped buds to come out.

He took the lovely little rose-tree home, and placed it, in all its purity and sweetness, by little Hermie's side while he still slept. It was good to see the man as he went hungry without his mid-day meal that day, thinking about the little one, and picturing his delight over his flower.

CHAPTER II.

AND certainly never was a little boy made more grateful or more happy than little Hermie was by the sight of that rose-tree. For many days, even weeks to come, he almost lived for his beautiful flower. Considering what a very little child he was, he was a most clever little gar-He gave his precious plant just the right amount of water, and carried it from one sunny spot to another, in the small close room, to catch what light and warmth it could. He became at once both stronger and happier, and no longer wasted wistful glances over the boy whose pockets were full of marbles. His father and mother both came to the conclusion that never was a shilling better spent than over that little rose-tree.

One day, after gazing for a long time very steadily at his roses, he ran to his mother's knee.

"Your birthday will be very, very soon, won't it, mother?"

His mother smiled, and kissed him. "Yes," she owned, her birthday would be the day after to-morrow.

"You will have presents, won't you, on your birthday, mother? My last birthday was when we were in the country, and father he gave me a top and you a cake. Mother, what presents will you get?"

"I don't think I shall get anything this year, deary, for you see we are very poor; besides, I am not a little child like you, my darling; I don't want a birthday present so very much."

"But you'd like one, wouldn't you, mother?" inquired the little boy.

"Well, perhaps I should, darling, but I'm not going to fret about it."

Hermie said nothing more, but a very, very wise look began to grow upon his little face. He went back to his rose-tree, and kneeling down by the sill where it stood, placed his two elbows on the sill and gazed hard at all its beauties. The first rose on the little tree had bloomed and faded; the second was now in full flower, just a little too full a flower for perfec-

But there was a third bud coming on. tion. Hermie watched that bud with a kind of ecstasy. He knew enough about flowers to be well aware that that one lovely bud would just be in perfection on his mother's birthday. that morning he would get up early and pick it for her, and give it to her when she awoke, and then his dear mother need not say again that she was without a birthday present. It should be quite a secret, a great, great secret. mother should know nothing whatever about it until the lovely rose was placed in her hand. Hermie looked round anxiously at where she still sat gravely at work, fearing that she might guess his thoughts if she saw him looking too long at his flowers. He moved a little away and tried hard to occupy himself with something else.

All the next day he anxiously watched his rose-tree; the bud was making all the progress he could desire, its delicate green covering was bursting away from it, and the lovely pink colour of the full rich blossom was becoming more seen each moment. Hermie knew well how very lovely that rose in its first tender bloom would look to-morrow. He wondered

over and over again what his mother would say, and he pictured to himself many times the surprise and delight which he was sure would come on her face.

The night before his mother's birthday the little boy felt so excited that he could scarcely sleep. All through his broken slumber he dreamed of his rose-tree, and was not sorry when, early in the morning—much earlier than usual—his father came to him, and taking him in his arms, said: "Your mother is not very well, my little man, and I am going to take you into the next room in case you should disturb her. But I will take in your blankets, and make you up a little bed on the sofa, for it is too early for you to get up yet."

"But this is mother's birthday," said Hermie.
"Why should mother be ill on her birthday?"
Then he remembered afresh his rose-bud, which must be in such perfection just now, and smiled and said: "But I have something for her which will make her quite, quite well at once. Please father, I don't want to stay in bed; may I be dressed now?"

Without a word his father put on Hermie's little clothes, and then, opening the sitting-room

door, let him run in alone. There were neither shutters nor even blinds to the windows of the poor sitting-room, and Hermie ran at once to the sill where he had placed his beautiful rose-tree the night before. Alas! alas! it was then that he came across the cause of the bitterest grief he had ever known in all the course of his small life.

The rose-tree was not on the window sill: but lying on the ground, just at Hermie's feet, lay the broken pot, and the crushed blossoms, and the poor mangled, destroyed tree, while that particular bud, about which the little child had hoped and planned and dreamed—that one special, lovely bud had absolutely disappeared. It was then that the tears came into those bright blue eyes, and that the little figure took that despairing attitude which we see when this short story opens. Hermie, as I have said, or at least hinted, was a very manly boy, and he would not cry; first, because to cry would be, he considered, so like a baby; and second, because his dear, dear mother was ill, and she might hear him. But at the thought of his mother the effort to keep back his tears was very difficult, for if anything in all the world would have made her well again, of this he felt absolutely sure, it must have been that beautiful rose-bud.

He was standing so, wondering what strange thing had befallen him, when he was not a little startled, and even alarmed, by hearing a short, mocking laugh in the room behind him. He turned his head, and there stood the boy, about his own age, the boy whose marbles he had so often coveted. This boy had a very red face, and his manner was also most insulting and trying.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he said, "so yer looking for yer rose-bud. Why don't yer look under the pot? May be it have hid itself away there. Look well under the pot—cry-baby!"

In his innocence and anxiety Hermie did stoop down, and peered under the broken pot, at which action the naughty boy laughed louder than ever.

"Oh! please do you know who took my rose-bud?" asked the little child. "Oh! it's so dreadful when I wanted it for mother's birthday. Do you know how my plant got broken, and why my lovely bud has all gone quite away?"

"Yes, I know," answered the red-faced boy.

"I know werry well indeed. It wor I as did it. I didn't mean to break the pot, nor to do nought to the tree itself. But I wanted that 'ere bud. Why shouldn't I have that bud as well as yer? There! you can see it if yer likes," and he pulled a much crushed and injured rose-bud out of his pocket, where he had hastily thrust it when Hermie's unexpected entrance into the sitting-room at so early an hour had startled him. Now, with a loud and most taunting laugh, he pushed the injured flower into little Hermie's face; then, rushing off with it in triumph, he ran downstairs.

Poor little Hermie! all his wish not to be a cry-baby, all his anxiety not to disturb his mother, deserted him at that sight. Tear after tear rose to his eyes and rolled rapidly down his cheeks, and at last, in an agony of despair and grief, he flung himself on the floor by the side of the broken flower-pot and mangled tree. There, half an hour afterwards, his father found him.

"Oh! father, it's all, all gone—all my beautiful present for mother," he sobbed, and he pointed to the broken rose-tree; then in gasping words he told his sad little tale.

His father had a very soothing and loving way with this only little son. He took him in his arms and kissed him and petted him; and Hermie, after his dismal lying on the floor, and that cruel, cruel boy's taunting words and looks, felt so soothed and comforted in those kind, strong arms, that presently he forgot his troubles, and fell into a sound sleep.

When an hour later he awoke, his father was still holding him. He was looking at him very tenderly, and when Hermie opened his eyes he stooped down and kissed him.

"My own little son," he said, "I am so sorry for you."

"It was quite stolen away, father," said Hermie. "The boy said he had a right to it, but he hadn't, had he, father? It was my very own rose-bud, wasn't it, father?"

"The boy did very wrong," said his father.

"He did not do quite so wrong as you would have done, had you taken it, Hermie. Still, as you say, he stole it. Yes, he did very wrong."

"But why did he not do as wrong as I should have done, father?"

"Because, my laddie, I have seen that poor

boy, and I am greatly afraid that he has no kind mother like you have to teach him what is right and what is wrong. Perhaps, Hermie, no one ever told that poor little boy that it was wrong for him to steal."

Hermie raised his thoughtful blue eyes to his father's face. After a time he whispered, "May I say my Lord's Prayer to you, as mother is ill this morning?"

"Yes, my lad."

So Hermie, still keeping his place on his father's lap, got upon his knees, and folding his hands, and with his eyes fixed on his earthly father, began those familiar and most blessed of all words to his heavenly Father. Doubtless his heavenly Father heard the softly spoken words, and looking down into the brave baby heart, comforted and strengthened it. For after a pause, when the little prayer had ended, Hermie whispered again, "My Lord's Prayer says that I've got to forgive that boy?"

"Yes, lad," answered his father, nodding his head.

Hermie still remained on his knees, his hands were still folded.

"I do forgive that boy," he said, after a long

second pause. "He's a bad, poor boy, but he knowed no better. I forgive him though he was so dreadful, dreadful cruel to my little rose-tree. Now, father, may I pray something else?"

"You may, my little lad, and God bless yer fur as fine a little chap as I've seen fur many a day."

Hermie did not half understand these words of praise.

"Please, Lord Jesus," he said, "give mother another birthday present 'stead of my rose-bud."

At these words Hermie's father smiled, though there were tears very near his eyes. But just then there was a commotion in the next room, and a woman whom Hermie had never seen before, put her head out, and motioned Penfold to enter. He did so, leaving Hermie once more alone in the sitting-room. But before the door had closed upon him, the little boy heard a sound coming from his mother's bedroom, which startled him very much. The colour rushed into his cheeks, he clasped his hands, and even forgot his rose-bud when he heard it.

The fact was, that peculiar little sound had brought back to Hermie a very precious memory. Once before a similar cry had fallen on his ear. It had come from the lips of a little baby-brother, who had stayed with them all just one day, and then had gone up to God to heaven.

What did that wonderful noise mean? Had God sent back his little brother? Should he have a companion of his own at last?

"Hermie," said his father's voice. He was standing by the open door, and beckoning to him to enter.

The bedroom was darkened, but Hermie saw at once his mother's dear, pale face. She smiled at him, and held out her hand.

"Yes, I am better, darling," she said, answering his anxious look. But before he could say a word or make one inquiry, of the many which were crowding to his lips, that same faint sound was again heard, and this time it came from his mother's bed.

"I have something to show you, my little Hermie," she said, and pushing aside the bedclothes she let the little boy see nestling in her arms such a tiny, tiny pink-faced baby! "Oh!" he said, and he raised himself on tip-toe to peer into the morsel of a face.

"A little baby-sister sent by God, and she is to be called Rose," said the mother.

"Did God really send her as a birthday present 'stead of my rose-bud?" asked Hermie, in a quick tone of great excitement.

"I believe He did," said the father, "fur she'll be a real rose-bud, ef she's called Rose, eh! wife?"

"And Hermie won't be lonely without a companion again," said the mother.

Just then the baby, opening its eyes, twined its little pink fingers round one of Hermie's. It seemed as if the tiny new-born creature was giving herself into the older child's possession.

"Is she my rose-bud, too?" he asked.

And father and mother smiled and said "Ves."

* * * * . * *

That is the little story.

Hermie was none the less able to understand his first great joy for having just before borne so bravely his first great sorrow. God, in taking away from him the less, had given him the better. God often does this, and those who love Him know it and are glad. Hermie never again was a lonely boy, and even the rose-tree was forgotten in the joy of this living Rose.

I believe, too, that by-and-by both Hermie and his mother got to know that poor, ignorant little lad downstairs; and he, too, learned from loving and gentle lips something of true right and true wrong, so much so that never again in his life was he guilty of stealing another rose-bud.

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"THE LEAST OF THESE, MY BRETHREN."

"Earth is full of Heaven, and every common bush aftre with God."

CHAPTER I.

"JACOB GILES never did a kind thing in his life, and it ain't to be expected as he'll begin now. Them as isn't chickens don't often take up with their tender manners."

These remarks were addressed by a rough-looking woman to a man who nodded and laughed in her face. "Ain't you Jacob Giles yourself, and ain't you ashamed to be?" she continued, nettled by his indifference and jeering laugh. He just nodded, turned on his heel and walked away.

It was a dreary winter's night, and the street, although a London one, was almost deserted. The man soon turned a corner, into a more brilliant thoroughfare. Here the light from many gas jets fell on his face and figure. The figure so revealed was large, bony, powerful—the face hard. It looked like the lowest type of human face cut out in granite, so utterly ex-

pressionless was it, so incapable, to all appearance, of being moved by any emotion whatever.

He walked rapidly, and with an apparent object in view. Once only he stopped. At the corner of a fresh street where a gust of wind met him, and the light of a gin-palace streamed across his path, he stopped, but not to enter. He looked in, it is true, then made a solitary remark aloud—

"Jacob Giles never did a kind thing in his life."

He laughed as he had done before when the woman had told him so. He repeated her remark now as though it gave him pleasure, then walked on faster than ever.

At last he reached his destination. It was an attic at the top of a tall dilapidated house. He shared this attic with another man. His comrade had been away for some weeks now. He mounted up flight after flight of the dirty stairs, and entered the room which was his home.

He had his evening planned out with tolerable distinctness; he would eat and drink and sleep—he had the means within reach to secure to himself these enjoyments, and they formed to him the sum total of life.

Jacob Giles entered the room, went to a corner where he knew some lucifer matches were to be found, struck one against the sole of his boot, applied it to the end of a thin dip candle, and then stood still.

"Wat's up!" he said.

He was not a man given to make exclamations of any kind, and even this one, drawn from him in the extremity of his surprise, was accompanied by no change of countenance. He drew a step nearer to what the light revealed, and stood motionless.

What he saw was this. A young woman dressed in the quiet garb of a hospital nurse sat on the trundle bed. She held in her arms a child, a small, weak, suffering boy of perhaps four years of age.

"I say!" exclaimed Giles again, "whatever brings you here—and who's he?"

"Are you James Thompson?" asked the young woman. Then without waiting to hear his hasty disclaimer, she continued: "We were told at the hospital that James Thompson lived here. This is his little boy, he has been in the hospital for nearly six months. The doctors have done all they could, and so have we. He

will never be better, the doctors say, and we know that is true. We are very sorry—more sorry than I can put into words, but we cannot keep incurables in Great Ormond Street, and so—and so I have brought him home." As the young woman said the last words, she glanced round her nervously.

"This ain't much like father's home," said the child, fixing his wide-open, dark eyes on her face.

"But you are James Thompson," continued the nurse, seeing that her listener remained silent.

Giles felt very angry. "Do I look like Thompson?" he said in his hardest and most jeering tone. "Am I weakly?—am I pale?—am I long o' face, and piping o' woice?—do I look as if I 'ad a young 'un like that? My name is Jacob Giles. That name no way resembles Thompson, as I can see."

Hospital nurses require great patience, and this one answered the rude and angry harangue of her companion gently.

"You certainly are a strong man, but I never knew that Thompson was weak. What am I to do with the child?" "Dun know," said Giles, turning his back on her and walking to the fireplace.

The fire was nearly out. He stooped down and built it up. Strong as he was, his hands were trembling with suppressed anger; he was longing to be openly rude to the young woman. As to the child, he had not even glanced at him. As he laid the fire and fanned it into flame, there was total silence in the room, but when it blazed up ruddy and bright, the child said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "Now, that 'ere's better!—that spark o' fire's real comforting, ain't it, nurse?"

Giles turned round and stared at the small speaker.

"What am I to do with the little one tonight?" asked the nurse, taking advantage of his direct gaze. "We were certainly told that Thompson lived here. I must not take the child back again, for the hospital is quite full; perhaps you can tell me about Thompson. If he is not here, where does he live? I was given this address," and she took a piece of paper out of her pocket. Whether it was the child's expression, or the young woman's voice, Giles felt himself compelled to answer more gently.

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"He wor my pal," he said; "he lived yere wid me. Oh! yes, the place is right enough, but Thompson ain't been 'ome fur weeks past, and I never knew as he had a little 'un sick and in 'orspital."

"But if this is Thompson's home, how soon is he likely to be back?" asked the nurse.

"That I can't rightly say; perhaps to-night, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps never."

"Charlie, what am I to do?" asked the young nurse, looking down at her little charge.

"I'll stay here, and wait fur father," answered the small piping voice.

"May he stay for the night?" asked the nurse. "Will you let him stay on the chance of his father's return? I will come and see him to-morrow, and I will pay a woman downstairs something to look after him."

Giles growled. Then he pointed to a bed at the other end of the room. "That 'ere's Thompson's bed," he said then; "Thompson pays fur it, so I s'pose as his young 'un may lie there."

Then, actuated by some feeling, he knew not what, he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER II.

HE remained away for two hours, during which time he wandered up and down the neighbouring streets. The rain fell heavier than ever, and he got pretty well wet through. He visited, however, no public-house for either refreshment or shelter, and at the end of the two hours stumbled once more up the stairs to his attic home. The aspect of the room had changed during his absence. The hospital nurse had gone, but the bed at the other side from his own had been made up. The sick child lay in it, and a woman who he knew to inhabit another part of the house sat by his side. Giles walked up to her, and spoke in his gruffest tones.

"This 'ere is my room — you get out of this."

"I'm just making little Thompson comfortable, Jacob," replied the woman. "I'm setting yere wid him for a spell, the little 'un's lonesome,

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and I said as I'd set by him till he dropped asleep."

"Do you want me to kick you out?" said Giles, raising his foot as he spoke.

The woman was a timid one; she turned pale, and rose hastily. "There, my dear," she said, bending over the child, "you rest easy, and I'll look h'in in the morning—first thing in the morning when he goes out, my dear; try and sleep now."

Then she went away, looking back anxiously as she did so.

Giles watched her to the door, which he locked. He then went and sat down by the fire, which burned brighter than usual in the grate. He said to himself that he would take no notice whatever of Thompson's child, that he would spend his evening as usual, oblivious of his presence. It was certainly very annoying to have a sick child in the room, but as he was Thompson's, and Thompson paid for half the room, he could not well turn him out. He would simply forget him, not think of him at all. For this purpose he moved to the side of the fire nearest to his own bed, and taking down a short black pipe from over the mantelpiece,

lit it, and put it into his mouth. He had scarcely drawn two puffs, however, when a voice from the bed said—

"Please, Jacob Giles, put out that 'ere pipe; father don't smoke when I'm there, and I don't like it."

In utter astonishment at the audacity of the small voice, Giles did drop his pipe, turned round, and stared. The sick child had raised himself in bed to a sitting posture, and his bright eyes were fixed on Giles. The eyes looked so fearless, and yet the face such a mere baby one, that Giles felt, in the midst of his astonishment, a sort of amused admiration at words so bold coming from such a creature.

"Wot's yer name, young 'un?" he said, with his pipe still suspended in the air.

- " Charlie."
 - "Well, Charlie, I'll smoke ef I like."
- "I won't love yer, then," answered Charlie, and he turned away his head and began to whimper.
- "Bother that Thompson," said Giles to himself; "why did he leave his young 'un on my hands?"

Moved by some impulse, however, he went over and stood by the bed. "Don't cry, small chap," he said, and the softness of his own voice surprised him. "There, there, I won't smoke ef it vexes yer. Now give over crying, do." But Charlie's whimper had changed into sobs, and he would not be quickly comforted.

"I want the little children at the 'orspitle, and I want father," he said.

Most devoutly did Giles wish that his desire could be gratified. "What 'ud father do ef he wor yere?" he asked at last.

"He'd walk up and down wid me, or he'd hold my 'and; he did afore I went into 'orspitle. May be, he'd walk up and down wid me the whole night through."

"And I s'pose yer'd like me to be up to that little game?" asked Giles in a tone of dry sarcasm. The child, however, saw no sarcasm; he stretched out his tiny arms and raised his thin face.

"Yes, please, Jacob Giles, I'd like it werry well."

Giles felt himself turning crimson; he could not laugh in such a baby's face, neither could he refuse his request; he stooped, and the little arms clung to his neck. The next moment the man who had never done a kind thing in his life, found himself pacing up and down his attic, with Thompson's child lying in his arms.

CHAPTER III.

JACOB GILES was undoubtedly a very hard man, no one yet had found the vulnerable spot in him; naturally, therefore, he was unsympathetic, he neither gave sympathy nor asked for it. When ill, he wanted no woman to nurse him; when well, he needed no child to climb on his knees. Wishing for neither woman nor child, he took care not to marry: he liked best to live alone.

About three months, however, before the night on which a sick child was brought to his home, a man with whom he had been having a drink at the nearest public-house asked leave to share half his attic. Giles, though a good workman, was rather low in work just then, and the temptation to save half his rent was too great to be resisted. He did not want Thompson, he would much rather have done without him, but he let him come, taking very little

notice of him when he did so. Thompson was a tall, thin man, with a weak and troubled look about his face. He seemed rather afraid of Giles, and anxious to conciliate him. They had of course but one fire between them, and the making up of this fire, and the keeping of it in order, devolved on Thompson; he also kept the room tidy, and did a good deal of menial work for both his fellow-lodger and himself. Giles was well pleased that it should be so; but he never thanked Thompson by either word or look. They were a silent pair, often smoking their pipes for an hour or more without opening their lips. Giles indeed would forget Thompson, and Thompson seemed afraid to speak.

At night Thompson slept badly, and groaned often in his sleep. Once or twice Giles awoke and heard these groans, but they did not trouble him; they were Thompson's affair, not his.

Being so unobservant of all that did not immediately concern himself, he failed also to see how thin Thompson was growing, how white and yet whiter his face became. How often, even sitting by the fire with his pipe in his mouth, he sighed. Then how the pipe remained empty because there was no tobacco

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to fill it. Then how scanty and poor his meals became.

Giles saw all these things without observing them; but that they did enter into some portion of his brain was certain, for he remembered them by-and-by.

One morning, after a specially miserable night, during which even Giles was disturbed by his groans, Thompson came and put his share of the week's rent into his hand.

"I won't be in may be to-night, comrade," he said; "you pay it," pointing to the money. "And thank yer, comrade, fur never saying a rough or unceevil word."

Giles noticed how ill and strange he looked, and for half an instant felt half inclined to call after him, and give him sixpence out of the money to buy a warm meal. He did not do so, however.

That night Thompson's bed was empty, and night after night returned without his putting in an appearance. Giles ceased to expect him, though something—he knew not what—prevented his offering his bed to any other mate.

Six weeks had passed away, when the sick child was brought into the room—he was

Thompson's child—and Giles spent some hours of the night walking up and down with him. As he held the little creature in his arms, and saw the contented expression of the dark eyes fixed on his face, he remembered Thompson's groans, and Thompson's sadness. He also thought over again of his last words—"Thank yer, mate, for never giving me a rough word."

"Poor chap!" he found himself thinking.
"Small wonder he wor down in the mouth, wid
this young 'un on his mind."

Finally Thompson's child went to sleep, and Giles laid him back on the bed, but he could not sleep himself. He resolved to get up early and look for Thompson.

* * * * *

Thompson had died in the workhouse. His investigations soon brought this fact to light. Giles then went to the hospital where the sick child had been.

Alas! Charlie was an incurable indeed. He would never walk; he would never grow. Always, as long as he lived, he would be the tiny, baby-looking creature he now was. Giles received all the information about him in absolute silence.

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"If we can, we will try to get him into a Children's Incurable Hospital," said the nurse whom Giles saw; "and in the meantime, until we succeed—I suppose—I fear there is nothing for the poor little fellow but the workhouse."

"Yes, mar'm, there's the work'us, sartinly," said Giles, and he walked away.

CHAPTER IV.

As he walked away, he said to himself, "Tomorrow will be time enough for the work'us, and the woman downstairs'ull look arter the young 'un."

Then he went to his own employment, being an hour later in doing so. He worked, however, better than usual. Always a good workman, there was a look of resolve and interest now about his face altogether new. He was unconscious of this fact himself; but he did feel that the hours of the day went faster than ever before, and that he had something not very unlike happiness glowing within his breast. He could not understand his own feelings. Why should he be happy to-night? He had more than usual cause for depression. Had he not a sick child on his hands-a child who would probably again to-night disturb his rest? Did any one ever dislike children more than

Giles did? Why, then, should he feel in good spirits?

The fact, however, remained, argue about it as he would.

He went home at once when his work was over, buying on his road an apple and a cake for Thompson's sick little one.

As soon as ever he entered his room, the child sang out, in his shrill, fearless little voice, "I'm real glad, Jacob, as yer has come home." His large dark eyes looked softly at the man. The light of love was in them, though Jacob could not read their expression. He brought over the apple and cake and presented them rather shamefacedly.

- "Did father send them?" asked Charlie.
- "No; I bought 'em."
- "Well, lay 'em anigh me, yere. I might 'a known as father didn't buy 'em. He'd never 'a given a dry cake like this yere; but I'm all the same gratified to you, Jacob Giles."
 - "How old are you, small 'un?" asked Jacob.
 - "Seven. I'm werry small, ain't I?"
 - " Werry."
- "And I'll never grow no bigger. That sounds real sad, but it ain't. Father said, ef

they couldn't cure me in 'orspital, that he'd walk me about h'every night o' my life. I like father's arms about me; and he's so weakly hisself, he couldn't carry me ef I growed. H'everything's fur the best," concluded the baby-philosopher.

"But ef yer father don't come, ye'll have to go to the work'us. There'll be nobody to carry yer in the work'us," said Giles gruffly.

"But father'll come back," said Charlie, no cloud of fear or distrust on his sweet contented little face; "and you'll carry me to-night, Jacob, fur yer real good-hearted, I know."

Jacob laughed. "Yer the first as said that o' me, I guess, young 'un," he said; but he stooped down and lifted the frail little figure into his strong arms, and paced up and down with it as he had done the night before.

No; no one had said that he was goodhearted; no one had said that he was kind; but he could not frame the words from his lips that would convey the news to this little one that he was an orphan—a pauper sick child, who must live for the future in the workhouse.

He walked about with Charlie until, soothed

and comforted, he dropped asleep. Then, instead of returning him to Thompson's bed, he sat down with the little burden still in his arms. Surely he was to be pitied—this poor little one, who would never know health, never know manhood. Giles found himself disliking the idea of taking him to the workhouse, of leaving him there to the fate of the orphan and destitute. He had never pitied human being before; but he had yet to acknowledge that he had undoubted pity in his heart for this sick child of Thompson's—Thompson, who, from sheer want, had himself died in the workhouse. He felt not altogether comfortable about Thompson, who certainly was no friend of his, only just his mate for a few months. Still, the memory that he had let him go away to die was not a pleasant one. But what could he do with the boy? Could he keep him—keep him at least for a little time, until the kind hospital people had decided whether he could be admitted into the hospital for incurable children? It seemed almost impossible that he could bring himself to do this. Why, indeed, should he—he who, so his neighbours said, never did a kind thing in his life? Why should he do this thingrather more kind than anything the people who spoke against him had ever done? and yet—and yet—

- "Yer arms are real soft," said Charlie, who had awakened and was looking at him.
- "Young 'un," said Giles in his harshest voice, "s'pose—I'm not saying as it is so—but s'pose as that father o' yours don't come back, what 'ull yer do?"
- "Stay yere," answered Charlie, in a tone which seemed quite to have settled the question.
- "Well, I never! ain't yer cheeky? Why, this is my 'ome."
- "Yes, Jacob Giles, and it might be a bit cleaner; but ef I stays on yere for a spell, I'll teach yer."

Giles stared hard at him, then his eyes twinkled, then he burst out laughing.

"The cheekiest young 'un h'ever I seed," he remarked, relating the story afterwards. "No manner o' use in being rough on him, he wouldn't see it nohow."

But somehow neither could he see his way to sending Charlie away, for the very next moment the little one had pulled down his face 48 "THE LEAST OF THESE, MY BRETHREN."

and kissed it. It was quite impossible for Giles and he to part after that kiss of peace.

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For the heads of His sick little ones God prepares specially soft pillows, and in the rough arms of Jacob Giles he now laid one, bidding him nurse the child and He would give him his wages. It was a direct message, and the man—hard as he was—could not turn away from it. Instantly the hardness and selfishness in him began to melt—he had need of softness, and the need for it made it grow. Thus he earned his wages.

"As kind-hearted and good-natured a man as you'd like to meet, changed from a lion into a lamb," said the neighbours a year afterwards of Jacob Giles. And for the rest of his life he was a happier and more beloved man, because of his kindness and love to Charlie. So a good work of God was done by that little suffering child.

HOW NORA CRENA SAVED HER OWN.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days."

CHAPTER I.

THE hour was evening, and there was a storm coming on. A storm meant a great deal when it happened on a dark March night, on the wild, beautiful sea-coast of the south of Ireland. meant excitement to the half-savage fishing population; and it meant the direst disaster to the brave ships, gallantly ploughing their way towards the shelter of the yet far-distant harbour. The wind had been blowing great guns all day, and now that the night was coming down black and starless, the waves, gathering strength, rolled in with the noise of thunder on the broad, long beach. The waves had great crests, and broke in splendid foam, not only on the beach, but on the far more dangerous rocks that skirted one side of the shore.

High and perpendicular some of these rocks rose out of the water; sunken and pointed, sharp as knives were others; altogether, scarcely a more alarming coast could be found. And at the time of this story there was no friendly lighthouse to warn ships away from its perils.

The people on this part of the coast were so accustomed to shipwrecks-so accustomed to the cries of drowning men and women—that they made little of it. The women washed the dead, and laid them out for burial—not without interest, it is true, but scarcely with much pity; and the men purloined all they could from the wrecks, before the revenue officers could have time to claim them. But though hardened and bad enough in this matter, they were not so bad as some of their neighbours, for they never tried to lure the ships to their destruction. took contentedly enough the goods thrown up to them by the sea, but they never sacrificed life to obtain them. Nay, they endeavoured, in their own rough way, to aid the drowning seamen.

This night, as I said, was a rough one, and the men sat up in their mud huts and waited. They always did sit up and wait on these terrible nights, for seldom did one such pass without bringing them rich booty from the pitiless sea. They liked the booty, though had they been questioned they would have declared that they refused to lie down and sleep because they wanted to save life. Perhaps they had both motives in their untrained, untaught minds.

In one cabin, the cabin nearest to the shore, on this night sat round the pleasant-smelling turf fire, two men, a woman, and a child. The men smoked short pipes, the woman watched the boiling of some potatoes; the child sat and stared straight before her. The men looked very dirty and sullen, the woman had a rather troubled and worn expression; but not a shadow of either care or sullenness sat on the round face of the child: and the child was lovely. Her long black lashes curled upward; her blue eyes laughed, and no lilies or roses could be whiter and pinker than her dazzling complexion. She was but the type of many such children around, for these southcoast folks were a handsome race. She sat close to the blazing fire, with the most unconcerned expression possible, now and then watching the pot which held the potatoes, now and then yawning, but refusing all efforts on her mother's part to induce her to go and lie down. "Marciful Vargin!" exclaimed one of the men; "she must be close, from that."

He rushed from the cabin, followed by the woman and the other man. Little Nora, too, started to her feet, and prepared to follow her mother into the storm; but her mother pushed her back rather roughly, and locked the door behind her.

She uttered an indignant cry at this, then ran to the tiny cabin window and tried to peer out; but the darkness was far too dense to allow her to distinguish anything.

"They'll never lave me so much as one spalpeen of a child to save," she said, turning away with a sob, and pouting her rosy lips; "and I dhu want to save some one."

Then she returned to her low seat by the fire, and, pressing her head against the dirty wall, fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY in the morning little Nora was awakened by the sound of heavy steps and eager voices. Presently the cabin-door was unlocked. Her mother entered first, carrying in her arms a dead child; then the men came with other bodies, all of which they laid, with a kind of rude reverence, on the floor of the small cabin. A great ship had gone down in the night, and every soul on board had perished.

The woman sobbed as she related the story, and told how she saw, in the fitful light of the torches, the faces of agonized women and frightened little children; and then she added that in all her experience she had never seen the wreck of so large a vessel, or the wholesale destruction of so many human beings. As she spoke, she occupied herself busily over the dead whom the sea had given up. But little Nora could not bear to look at the faces of the

drowned people, and she ran hastily out of the cabin and down to the shore, where the waves were now quieting themselves, and the sun lighting them up with a thousand brilliant rays. A great many other ragged children played on the beach, and when they saw Nora they went to her and wanted her to join in their play. But little Nora was puzzled; she saw the drowned people too distinctly with her mental eyes to care to play, so she ran away from her companions up high on the rocks.

As she clambered up the steep rocks, she said to herself, "Well, well, and I might have saved that little baby!"

Nora, at eight years old, had a great idea of her own prowess. She was almost as much a water as a land creature; she could wade, and swim, and dive, and as to her capabilities for climbing almost impassable rocks, no little kid could be more agile.

To-day she ran fast, trying to escape from the faces of the dead men and women, and the sad thoughts which perplexed her little mind.

At last she came to a rock steeper than any she had yet ascended. This rock, rising high out of the sea, could only be approached at very

low tide; and at its farthest base the waves, even on the finest summer day and at the lowest tide, dashed angrily; but at the side nearest to Nora the sand was left dry for about half an hour at every low tide. It was dry now, and Nora's experienced eye perceived that she had the full half-hour to undertake any scheme that might enter her active little brain. She had a scheme already planned—a scheme often thought about, often longed for. She wanted to climb that almost perpendicular rock, and look down on the unknown world of sea and wave at the other side. No doubt it was a dangerous feat, but Nora thought of no danger; here was her opportunity. Should she lose it? not for worlds. With her bare feet—feet that had never known either shoes or stockings-she ran swiftly over the tiny bit of dry sand, and began to climb the rock. No boy or girl in all the village of Armeskillig had ever performed so daring a piece of climbing before. Nora knew this, and the thought made her redouble her ardour; panting, struggling, clinging to little bits of sea-pink and other scant herbage, she still persevered. Such perseverance must bring success. In a very few moments Nora, trembling, but triumphant, found herself at the top. Here she rested for an instant, then looked down with eager eyes at the new and unknown world. For aught she could tell, the very sea might be different here, the very waves of another hue; her blue eyes danced as she looked down at them, for what might she not see? What she did see, however, was a common sight enough to her Irish eyes-the very same waves, the very same sharp, cruel rocks, the very same foam, white and creamy; but there was something else which quite as much took her breath away, and quite as completely astonished her, as if she had really beheld waves of crimson and rocks of blue, for seated on the sharpest and tallest of the rocks was a solitary human being, a person half-drowned indeed, and shivering, but of a totally different type, and dressed in a totally different manner, from any of the inhabitants of the village of Armeskillig. Nora clapped her hands and uttered a shrill cry at the sight of this unexpected human apparition. Her cry made the man, perched in this dangerous position, look up.

[&]quot;Who are you?" called the child.

[&]quot;A drowning man. Quick, child, for the love

of Heaven, get some one to come and save me!" called back the stranger.

"He was one of the men on the wreck, and they were not all drowned," thought little Nora. Her heart beat hard and fast at the thought, for here, at last, at last, might be some person left for her to rescue. All her little life Nora had longed to save some one from the cruel, angry sea, and here at last might be her chance. She put up her two hands to her mouth, and shouted through the tube she thus formed—

"If ye'll plaze to get back inter the water, and swim, as fast as yer life is worth, to the left of ye, there's a bit of smooth water atween two rocks, and when ye gets ahint that ye'll find druy land. Go quick, for the love of the Vargin, and I'll meet ye down low."

The little curly head vanished with the completion of these last words, for Nora was clambering back again as fast as she could to the bit of shingle where she was to meet the stranger.

When she got back there, she waited for a moment or two in a perfect turmoil of suspense—would the man come, would he venture? He was perfectly safe if he would only take Nora's advice. But would he trust her? Oh, why had

she not waited at the top until she had really seen him enter the water? In her intense anxiety—for the tide was fast returning to the little bit of shingle—Nora fell on her knees, clasped her hands, and prayed—"Blessed Mary, please let me save a man." She rose again to find the stranger standing by her side.

"Now come quick home to mother," she said, becoming practical in her intense pleasure and relief.

As they walked back to the little village, more than half a mile away, neither rescuer nor rescued spoke; indeed, the nearly drowned man had no strength left for words. He found it almost impossible to walk, and reserved his fastfailing energies for this necessary exercise.

When at last they neared the little cabin, Nora danced from his side, flew in, and up to her mother's side.

"Oh, mother, mother! I've saved a man me own self! I have indeed!"

CHAPTER III.

THE man whom Nora had saved from the wreck of the New York was an American by He had made a large fortune in his native country, and was on his way to England to spend it. All he possessed was on board the ill-fated New York, and he now found himself in the cabin of the O'Neales absolutely penniless, poorer even than his peasant entertainers. He had, however, escaped with his life, whereas all his companions were dead. For many days after his escape he could think of nothing but the wonderful deliverance that had been granted to him. Indeed, for a time he was too weak and ill to be able to give many thoughts to his altered worldly prospects. His violent efforts on that dreadful night, and his long immersion in the sea, had brought on low fever, and it was a week and more before he was well enough to rise from the rude bed where Mrs.

O'Neale had placed him. During this time he had many visitors, not only among the poor inhabitants of Armeskillig, but also from the richer people of the place. One and all of these better-off people wanted to serve him, and one and all offered to take him in, and make him more comfortable than he could be at Mrs. O'Neale's. Hudson, however—for that was his name—had taken a fancy to kind little Nora, and preferred staying with her and her people in their very humble abode. At the end of a week he grew better, and he and Nora took many walks together, and learned to know a great deal about each other. Nora chattered away in her broken English, and Hudson found her innocent talk a pleasant diversion from his own anxious thoughts. For with renewed health the altered state of his worldly prospects could not but puzzle the man. not a farthing in the world, and when he left the O'Neales he had nothing before him in this strange land but beggary. Hudson was a good man, one who feared God, and who in all his business transactions never forgot the Master whom he would serve, and the Judge who would one day ask him to give an account of

his stewardship. His faith in his heavenly Father did not forsake him now; but there is no doubt, as he walked with little Nora on the beautiful wild sea-coast, that faith was often sorely tried.

One day his thoughts were too sad to allow him even to notice the child's ceaseless prattle.

"What's ailing ye?" she asked, when the silence had become oppressive.

"I am very rude, Nora," said Hudson. "But the fact is I am a good deal troubled."

Nora's blue eyes were opened very wide at this.

"Yer not," she said; "ain't yer a jintleman? Why, me mother says as yer rael quality, and I thought as it was only us poor folks as had any call to be troubled."

"You are quite right, Nora; poor folks are troubled, and I am very poor; I am poorer than your good father and mother. I have no money at all."

"Faith," said Nora, "ain't there the bite, and the sup, and the welcome for ye always wid us? Ye have no call to need money."

"Thank you from my whole heart, my dear little girl; but I cannot stay always here. Yes,

the want of money is a very serious trouble," continued Hudson, again relapsing into silence.

"Pray to the Vargin," continued Nora. "I'm tauld that she's moighty kind-hearted."

Hudson took her hand.

"Yes, my dear little girl, the Virgin is kindhearted, but she cannot hear me. I will pray to the Virgin's dear Son—to our Lord Jesus Christ, He is kinder, and He can hear prayer."

Nora did not understand. But after this talk she became grave and thoughtful. She did not like her man whom she had saved from the sea to be troubled, and as she told her beads night and morning, she always added a petition to the kind "Vargin," whom she still believed in, to give him a little money.

One day she was sitting alone by the hedge, thinking, as she always thought now, of Hudson. As she sat thus, a rich gentleman, who lived in the neighbourhood, rode by. When he saw Nora, he pulled up his horse. Unknown to herself, little Nora had become a sort of heroine, for it was well known all over the country that the little child had been the direct means of saving the only individual who had been rescued from the unhappy New York.

"Well, Nora," said the gentleman, "and how is your hero? How is Hudson?"

"Thank yer honour kindly, but he's onasy enough," replied Nora, sliding from the hedge as she spoke and dropping a profound curtsey.

"Uneasy? I am sorry to hear that. Poor gentleman, is he not well?"

"Begging yer honour's pardon, but he ain't a jintleman; he's jist a poor body. He's as poor as father and mother and me."

"You are not poor, Nora; you are too pretty. And so the poor fellow lost his all in the wreck; I heard a rumour that it was so. I suppose he would like a little more money, Nora?"

"Ain't he praying for it day and night!" said Nora, clasping her hands.

At this remark the gentleman smiled and rode away.

But the interview bore fruit, for the next day this very same gentleman had another interview, not only with Nora, but with Hudson himself. The further result of this was, that a few days later on—the very day before Hudson had made up his mind that he must, penniless as he was, leave the Neales—two or three of the richest gentlemen of the neighbourhood sent for Nora, and put a purse of gold into her hand for her hero, the man whom she had saved from the sea.

With what delight Nora gave this same purse to Hudson it needs no words to tell.

"Nora Crena," he said, as, just before he left, he lifted her into his arms, "do you know that you have saved me in a double sense?"

"What's Crena?" asked Nora in reply to this.

"There's a song written about a girl called 'Nora Crena,' and you are she. Some day, my Nora Crena, I may be able to show you that I am not ungrateful to you and yours for all you have done for me."

CHAPTER IV.

BUT the wreck of the New York, fearful as it was, bore some good fruit. Such wholesale destruction of life could not but call forth general and public attention. Very shortly afterwards a lighthouse was built, and from that moment the dangerous coast ceased to be dangerous. The New York was the last vessel wrecked there. Years passed, and the dead rested undisturbed in their graves; the stranger pursued his solitary way, and the inhabitants of Armeskillig had ceased to remember either the great wreck or the man whom Nora had saved. Years passed, bringing other troubles to the poor people of Armeskillig, and even Nora forgot Hudson. From a pretty child she had grown up into a lovely girl. The belle and the pride of the simple little place was Nora O'Neale. At the wakes and the weddings no girl was more admired, and she might have

married more than one rich farmer had she pleased. Her old father and mother would have liked her to do so; but Nora's warm heart and high spirit caused her to prefer her true love, Mike O'Sullivan, a fisher-lad, as handsome and as poor as herself. When she was seventeen they were married, and went to live in another little mud cabin close to the old people. She and her Mike were indeed very poor; they had almost empty purses. "But what matter," they both said, "when their hearts were so full of love?" Yes, the first few years of Nora's married life were happy; but dark times must come to all, and they came to this peasant girl and to her people.

The famine of '47 and '48 fell, perhaps, more heavily on the southern coast than on any other part of the country. Through these dark times of starvation, fever, death, Nora and her husband and one little child had to pass. They had, it is true, been accustomed to privations all their lives, but now they began to learn what hunger, unsatisfied hunger, meant. The potato crop failed utterly. The nice large stack of peat—or turf, as it was called—no longer stood at the back of the little cabin. Added to this, the winter

of this dark year set in with unusual severity; snow and sleet even visited this usually warm southern shore. The poor people had no fires to warm themselves by, and no food to keep out the cold. One by one the children died and the old people, and only the strong and those in the full prime of youth remained. Relief was given by the richer neighbours. Not one in this dark time remained selfish; not one lived who did not practise the strictest self-denial; but at last the supply of food failed, and it could not even be bought for money.

Nora's father and mother, a wonderfully hale old pair, had managed to exist on almost nothing, and to endure, without drooping, the most severe cold. But one day early in January the old man was overtaken in a field, where he was in vain digging for roots to satisfy his terrible hunger, by a snow-storm; he returned to his cabin wet to the skin, and the next day was dead.

The nearest neighbours ran to tell Nora.

"Yer father is dead and yer mother is dying," they said.

Nora had been dividing with her child the last of the Indian meal with which they had

been supplied. The little child, satisfied, had dropped to sleep. Nora was about to taste her own small portion; at the neighbour's words, however, she wrapped the little yellow bowl with its meagre contents into her cloak, stooped down to kiss her sleeping child, and ran swiftly to the little cabin to her dying mother.

"Here, mother, agra," she whispered, "for the love of Heaven take a bite of this good male; it'll put some strength inter yer."

But the dying woman had no hunger left in the pathetic eyes she raised to her pretty daughter's face.

"Ate it yerself wisha, darlin'," she said. "I don't want no more mate. Yer father's gone, Nora. He jist come home wet thro', and never spake, except once to say, 'Never mind, Biddie, the hunger 'ull soon bring us together;' and then he died as asy as a babe; and I'm going to him, Nora. But it isn't the hunger, for bite nor sup now could not I ate for nobody; my throat's all closed up like."

"A drop of wather then, mother," said the daughter, who knew this sign of dying from starvation. "A drop of wather, for the love of the Vargin, mother."

"No, no, child; nothing as 'ull kape me from my old man! No, Norry. I know I'm going to-night. Oh, musha, musha! isn't it a black, black year? Us dying off with never a priest, nor the holy wather, nor a brass farthing to say a poor mass for our souls in the fires of purgathery afterwards."

The poor woman began to moan and sob most piteously, and Nora tried to comfort her by every loving word she could think of.

"Look here, mother, agra," she said, "I promise yer faithful that if ever the blessed Vargin gives us back the maley potatoes, and the good bit of turf, and the old plenty, I promise yer, mother, that if so be as Mike and me and the child is alive—any of us, or all of us—why, mother, we'll never let more than what 'ull jest kape the life in us pass our lips until we gets you and my father out of the fires of purgatory. I promise you that true and faithful, mother."

"You promise me that true and faithful," repeated the poor woman, "with the very first money you comes by, Nora, agra?"

"Yes, yes, mother; the very first. You rest asy."

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"But it's a long, long way off," said the poor dying woman, "and it don't satisfy much like." And, stretching out feeble hands of longing towards some better Mediator between God and her sins than the priest's masses, she died.

CHAPTER V.

THE poor people of Armeskillig were by this time too much accustomed to death to grieve as they would do in ordinary days for those whom starvation had taken from them. Nora's heart indeed felt like lead; but she shed no tears over her dead parents. On the contrary, she gravely and quietly performed the last offices for them, then turned to leave the little cabin.

Before doing so, however, she cast a swift glance round the desolate abode. Was there anything which an avaricious neighbour could steal? No; the little cabin was bare and empty; nothing was to be found there, but the straw on which the dead pair lay side by side, and the empty pot hanging over the fireless hearth. She was leaving, satisfied on this point, when something seemed to impel her to return, to stand on tiptoe and to examine a shelf which from her situation on the floor

seemed to be empty. She moved her hand softly along its dusty top, then started backit had come in contact with something unexpected. She drew down from the shelf a Forgotten for many years must small box. this box have lain. Nora brought it to the fast-failing light and opened it, for it was only fastened by a rusty key, which was in the lock; inside, lying on wadding, which still was dry, lay something round, large, and glittering. Nora uttered an exclamation of astonishment and delight, then slipped it on her arm. did not half know its value; it was in truth a gold bracelet of massive workmanship, probably saved from some wreck; it might buy a meal, however, and putting box and all into her pocket, she at last turned the key on the old couple, who would never know earthly care or disturbance again.

That night Nora showed what she had found to her husband. "'Tis pretty, Mike," she said, "and I'm thinking as Mrs. Mahony, the baker's wife at Farringalway, would maybe give me a loaf or two for it. I'll put me cloak on and run wid it to her in the morning."

But Mike knew more of money and of the

value of metals than Nora. He examined the bracelet very carefully, rubbing it on his sleeve as he did so, then with a flash in his big black eyes he turned and clutched his wife's thin arm.

"Nora, agra, praise the Vargin, praise the Vargin!" he exclaimed. "Why, Nora girl, 'tis gowld, 'tis rale gowld, and ye can sell it and get money for it, and we'll have food, we and our little one. Oh, Nora; praise be to the Vargin!" and with that the poor fellow, weakened and excited by long fasting, laid his big head on the little deal table and fairly sobbed.

Afterwards they had a long consultation, and it was finally determined that early in the morning Nora was to walk to Farringālway, a small town about three miles away, and consult Father Maguire on the best method of making money with their treasure.

CHAPTER VI.

To be a true Irishwoman, you must be superstitious. Nora O'Sullivan was faithful to her country and her race in this particular; ignorant and untaught, but with warm affections and fine instincts, was this beautiful young peasantwoman.

On the morning after the death of her parents and the discovery of the gold bracelet, she rose early, almost before a streak of the short cold winter day had appeared, put the little box in her pocket, and after kissing softly her sleeping husband and child, stole out of the cabin on her road to Farringalway to consult Father Maguire. As she bent over her child, she noticed that it moaned more piteously than usual; and by the flickering light of the rush-light she held in her hand, she observed, as she had never done yet, how emaciated was its little face.

Poor Nora had many reasons for looking

heavy-hearted as she left her humble little home. As she remembered her errand, however, she quickened her steps and her spirits After all, had she not that in her pocket which would purchase bread? had she not found a treasure which, used with judicious management, might save her and hers until the darkest of the dark days had passed away? How lucky that she had happened to look back before leaving her mother's cabin! Had she neglected to do so, another might have discovered her treasure. Nora wondered how her father and mother had forgotten the gold bracelet themselves, and she tried to guess from which of the many wrecks she had lived to witness had it been rescued. This brought her thoughts back to the greatest and proudest memory of her childhood; namely, to the thought of the man whom she had saved from the sea. She had never forgotten this kind stranger, his face came many times between her and her dreams, and she wondered now, as she walked quickly over the muddy road which led to Farringalway, how the world had prospered with this man, who knew so well when last she saw him what hunger meant.

"The kind Vargin 'ud help him, for he was a good man," sighed Nora; but then she remembered how Hudson had never prayed to the Virgin—nay, more, that he had said the Virgin could not hear him. This thought puzzled and made her sad; for what could be more dreadful for any one—so thought this Roman Catholic girl—than to be a black Protestant? and, of course, if Hudson did not pray to the Virgin he must be that.

Well, at any rate, she and hers were safe. They belonged to the true faith, and after passing for a season through the fires of purgatory, would be carried by the angels safe to heaven. But these last thoughts reminded her too forcibly of her father and mother. They—they were in purgatory now—and, oh! dreadful thought, what a very long time they must remain there, for there was no money to get masses said for the release of their souls. At this juncture in her thoughts Nora stood still in her rapid walk, pressed her hand to her forehead, and uttered an exclamation of pain and perplexity.

Vividly before her rose the agonized dying face of her mother. Vividly in her ears sounded

the dying words of her mother: "Nora, you promise that you will find money to have masses said for me and your father." And vividly again she heard her own reply: "Mother, I promise. I promise with the very first money I get."

What then was she doing with this money that she had found in her own parents' house? What ought she to do with it?

Ought she to spend it in supplying the temporal wants of her and hers? Ought she not rather to give it up to purchase for her father and mother eternal ease and peace—eternal good times in heaven?

Poor Nora's heart beat hard with the agony of the doubt and the fear which came over her. Oh, what could she do? Could she give the gold bracelet up? Could she die herself? Yes; perhaps this she might do. But could she see Mike die? Could she watch her little child crying feebly for bread, until it could cry no longer? This she could not do; this sacrifice of the present need to the future good was absolutely impossible.

She resumed her rapid walk, pressing her hand tightly as she did so on the little box

which contained her treasure. Again, as her quick feet carried her nearer to her destination, did she remember Hudson's words. He had spoken about praying to Jesus, not the Virgin; he had said that Jesus was kinder than the Virgin. Oh! could he be right and the priests wrong? And was Jesus kind enough to let her parents get to heaven without asking such a price as the gold bracelet at her hands? But Nora was too carefully brought up a Catholic to indulge long in these thoughts. Indeed, she shuddered at herself for thinking them, regarding them as the rankest heresy, as she walked along.

Her heart was perturbed and uneasy. A promise was a very sacred thing to Nora O'Sullivan. She also believed firmly in ghosts, and surely for all the rest of her days the ghosts of her dead parents would haunt her for breaking her solemn word.

Finally she resolved, in showing the bracelet to Father Maguire, to tell him of her trouble. She felt quite cheered as she thought of this plan, for she had an inward conviction that Father Maguire was too kind a man to counsel her to leave her husband and child to die.

The Roman Catholic priests of Ireland are scarcely a popular race; many of them are ignorant, and it is sadly to be feared that nearly all play on the superstitious fears of the unlearned of their flocks. Among them, however, humane and good men are undoubtedly to be found—men with hearts to feel, and with sound and kind advice to give.

To this class of priest belonged Father Maguire. He was an old man with silver hair, loved by rich and poor, by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. He refused to hold many of the strongest prejudices of his class and creed, and undoubtedly had Nora consulted him he would have counselled her aright. Father Maguire had known Nora from a child. She had knelt to him at her first confession, and he had married her to her handsome husband. Nora thought of his kind old face now with an ever-growing feeling of returning hope and confidence. There was, however, another priest who lived nearer to Armeskillig than Father Maguire, and this person differed almost as much from the kind old man as light does from darkness. He had not been long in the neighbourhood, but already he had helped to heap up

the darkness of the land, and in these dreary times had heightened, by his terrible false teaching, the sufferings of the unhappy people. This man—Father Nolan, as he was called—Nora now saw, with a start of dismay and dislike, riding towards her. As he drew near, his low forehead and heavy red face showed but too plainly—had any observer of character been there to see—what manner of man he was. Nora, however, saw none of the imperfections of the man. True, she could not love him as she loved dear old Father Maguire; but she believed in him truly, though her belief, it is true, was altogether caused by fear. Now, as he saw Nora, he drew in his horse.

"Well, Nora, my pretty lass," he called out loudly, "so I hear that the old people have gone off the hook."

"Yes, yer reverence," replied Nora, dropping a profound curtsey, and raising her blue, timid eyes; "they died yesterday, yer reverence."

"Dear, dear, and never a brass farthing to say so much as wan mass for their souls. Dear, dear, 'tis a pretty pass!"

"Will they be very long in the fires of purgatory, please yer reverence?" asked poor Nora.

"Will it never make the spalpeen of a bit of differ, that we is all dying wid the hunger, and haven't a morsel of bread, let alone money to spare for masses?"

"Not a bit of difference, Nora; there they'll burn till the money comes. Poor things, 'tis hard on 'em—yes, I must say as 'tis hard on 'em."

A feeling of indignation at the injustice of the whole thing gave Nora brief and sudden courage,

"Why, then, Father Nolan," she exclaimed, "if yer thinks it is so hard on 'em—and yer knows well that we're starving—why can't ye say 'em without the money being paid?"

A redder flush than even he was wont to possess suffused the priest's swarthy brow.

"And is it I that hears you, Nora O'Sullivan, talking such rank heresy? May the blessed Virgin forgive ye! No, Nora O'Sullivan, there's no manes but the manes the Church appoints, and they can't be had without money."

Nora's brief courage instantly evaporated at the sight of the priest's anger. She felt that she had said something dreadful, and stood timidly before him twirling her apron. "And where may you be going at this hour of the morning?" he continued. "Ain't yer never going to have a bit of a wake for the poor old people?"

"Please yer reverence, I was on me road to Farringalway; I wanted to see Father Maguire."

Now Father Nolan did not love Father Maguire, and the moment he heard that Nora was bound to him, he pricked up his ears with a very keen interest.

"Perhaps, my girl," he said in a soft voice, which he could manage to use now and then, "I may be able to help you as well as Father Maguire."

"'Tis a little message of Mike's, yer reverence; and he tauld me to see the father."

"But it's a long way off, and I am here. Indeed, now I come to think of it, you won't see him, for he's gone to a big wake across the country, and won't be back afore evening, if then."

"Dear, dear," said Nora in a perplexed tone. She did not want to trust Father Nolan—and yet, and yet—— As she hesitated, Father Nolan's sharp eyes saw a little corner of the box sticking out of her pocket.

"And what's that, my girl?" he said, stretching out his hand for it.

Nora dared not disobey. With a burning blush she placed the precious little box in his greedy hand.

"Please—please, yer reverence, I found it in me mother's room after she died yesterday, and I was taking it to Farringalway to see if Father Maguire could help me to get a bit of money for it, for Mike says it is gowld, yer reverence; and me, and me husband, and me little un is starving, yer reverence."

"And so ye took this out of yer mother's room, and ye said that ye had no manes to buy masses for their souls, Nora O'Sullivan! Well, you knew that this, as was theirs, 'ud very near take 'em out of purgatory. I'm astonished at you, Nora O'Sullivan!"

"Oh, please—please, yer reverence, indeed Mike and me and the little child are starving! Indeed—indeed, but for that the gowld bracelet should go for the masses!"

"And what's starvation of the poor body, misguided girl, compared to the flames of purgatory? What is that, you unfeeling girl, to what your poor parents are now enduring?

No, no, 'twas lucky I met you in time to prevent so great a sin. I'll keep the bracelet, and sell it to pay for masses. You may count yourself lucky, Nora, that you have been saved, for the sake of the poor body, as 'ull perish in a day, being the cause of yer parents' destruction for ever'n'ever."

So saying, Father Nolan slipped the box into his pocket and rode rapidly away.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR a long time after he had left her, poor Nora stood speechless and half-stunned by the roadside. She had a cruel feeling which rose above her faith in Father Nolan—her faith even in the creed in which she had been brought up—that she had been done; that the bracelet she had seen the priest carry off would really do nothing towards helping her mother and father out of purgatory. She could not forget Father Nolan's look when he told her that without money no prayers could be said; nor could she fail to remember the greedy expression which filled his eyes as they first rested on the glittering golden ornament.

And for this—for this her little son must die, and her husband must die! Oh, it was hard! Yes, it was hard; and Father Nolan was a bad and cruel man. Nora in her despair threw herself down on the wet roadside and

sobbed bitterly. Then, when her passion had spent itself, she turned with weak and lingering footsteps to retrace her way home. But, as she walked slowly home, her feelings again underwent a revulsion. The faith in her own creed and her father's and mother's creed began to revive, and she even began ere she reached the village to shudder at her own vehement passion against Father Nolan, and to try to feel thankful that by her opportune meeting of him she had been saved the great sin of leaving her father and mother an hour longer than was necessary in the fires of purgatory.

As she drew near the little village, she tried to shut out the thought of her child's piteous appeal for bread, and the look with which Mike would greet her when he learned that she had given up their last chance of life to Father Nolan, for Mike was quite sceptical enough to cordially hate Father Nolan.

Since the famine had reached its present fearful height, the village of Armeskillig had become a very quiet place; indeed, in the middle of the day it looked almost deserted. The poor people preferred to die quietly in their cabins, and seldom now complained loudly

or spoke much of their sufferings. The time was almost past for most of them to complain. They were too weak from long continuous famine to waste any of their feeble strengt in idle words.

Every morning about nine o'clock a man on horseback from the nearest manor-house used to ride down to Armeskillig with a bag of Indian meal, a very tiny supply of which he used to leave at each house. But for this help. small as it was, not a soul would now be alive in the famine-stricken place.

Nora knew, as she entered the village, that the man had long been; and with some faint quickening of her heart she hastened home to prepare the tiny mess thus provided for her husband and child. As she passed a cabin an old woman put out her head.

"Ah, Nora!" she wailed, "our last hope has failed us"

"What do you mane?" asked Nora.

"The man with the male is coming down no more. He says there's never another dhrop at the big house; and even money won't buy it, for there's none left in the country."

With these last words the old woman slam-

med the door behind her, being in truth too utterly hopeless even to complain.

Nora turned into her own little house. Her husband had already boiled the Indian meal, and had given a portion to the little child; but to-day, for the first time, the little tender child had turned away from the coarse food, and this fact made Nora's heart feel sick. Her husband looked at her inquiringly. She felt herself turning deadly pale. She could not speak the words which would proclaim death to them all.

As she hesitated, her husband bent tenderly towards her. An unusual sound was heard outside. A horseman who had galloped hard drew suddenly up at the cabin door. The horse was spattered and had foam about its mouth, and the man also looked tired from very fast riding. Nora and her husband both ran to the door.

"I'm told," said the man, as he dismounted and came towards them, "that a young woman who was known as a child by the name of Nora O'Neale lives here."

"Yes," said Nora, "I am she. What do you want with me?"

"Did you as a little child save a gentleman

called Hudson from the wreck of the New York?"

"Yes—oh yes; and have ye news of the good gentleman?"

"Well, I believe I have. Anyhow, here's a letter for you."

With these words he placed a large blue envelope in Nora's hand.

"Please read it at once," he said, "for I have ridden a long way, and I wait for instructions."

Nora could not read; but Mike could. He turned back with her into the little cabin; and as he read the words of the letter aloud, Nora held her boy in her arms.

"Nora Crena," began the strange writing—
"Nora Crena, I have not forgotten you; the man you saved from the sea has never let your pretty face fade from his memory. I have heard of the terrible distress of your people in Ireland. I have heard that that distress is worse in your part of the country almost than in any other. Nora, that purse of gold you gave me was blessed; with it I won back the fortune I had lost on board the New York. I am a rich man again. I know that you are

very, very poor now, and it is my turn to save you. Nora, as you read this letter, one of my largest ships waits at anchor in the harbour nearest to you. It is filled with meal and flour, and every other provision I could think of. It belongs to you-to you, to do what you can with, to help you, to give food to your own people, and to all the other people you love in your home and round your home. I believe this shipload will save you all until the worst of the dark days are over. As I write this letter to you, and send off these provisions, I feel that the proudest and happiest moment of my life has come. Now I ask for one other tiny favour at your hands. You told me that sometimes, long after the wreck of a vessel, treasures from it were washed ashore. Nora, if a small wooden box, containing a gold bracelet, was ever rescued from the New York, will you send it to me? The bracelet was the only thing I possessed belonging to my mother.

"Yours, my dear, with every blessing for now and hereafter, "JOHN HUDSON."

"Mike," said Nora—her eyes were quite dark with some thought, her lips trembled with ex-

citement; but her first words astonished her husband—"Mike, send the gentleman who brought this letter at once to Father Nolan. He have the bracelet. Yes, Mike, he—he stole it from me this morning."

It is a strange fact, but there is no doubt that, in the midst of his joy at so wonderful a deliverance. Mike could not help feeling almost wickedly glad, as he walked off himself to the priest's house, and after reading aloud for his benefit Hudson's letter, brought back the bracelet. But who can describe the excitement of the little place when the news of Nora's letter was known—the cheers which arose from weak lungs, the tears of joy which dropped fast from sunken eyes; and how one and all, when the carts and wagons containing the good flour, the abundance of Indian meal, and even some sacks of their own beloved potatoes, appeared in sight, every one-man, woman, and childwent out to meet them! And what a merry. and yet again what a solemn time had Nora that night, as she distributed these good gifts of God with her own hands to all, to friend and foe alike!

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But that is all. The ship with its contents brought back hope to Armeskillig—hope and life and strength—and not only to Armeskillig, but to all the country round. No more people from that neighbourhood died for want of food, for the contents of Nora's ship, as it was called, saved them all. And Nora—who now lived in a superior cottage, provided by the same kindness which sent the ship, and which not one heart in Armeskillig begrudged her—remained a heroine to her dying day,

UMBRELLA HOSPITAL.

" Where did you come from, baby dear?"

CHAPTER I.

WHITECHAPEL in summer—Whitechapel the month of August! On a particular day in that same month of August, 18—, when the thermometer was ninety in the shade, and no one cared to inquire how much over a hundred in the sun, a man of some age between fifty and sixty stepped out of a funny old-fashioned shop, and looked about him. The man had a fresh face, so fresh that you would have been inclined to pronounce him on the right side of fifty; but then, again, on the other hand, his beard was so silvery white that you would have verged from the freshness of the face to the silver beard, and said that he must be very close to sixty. He was, in reality, somewhere between the two—a man in the prime of that vigorous health which comes with the elderly part of middle-age, and with an intellect still in the freshness of its strength. He came out of the

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shop and looked about him. The shop was on the ground-floor of a tall and very narrow house; a house with a poor sort of roof, and no doubt miserable attics. In large letters was painted on a board over the shop—

"UMBRELLA HOSPITAL."

and over this board hung as a sign two umbrellas, one patched and otherwise showing its restored and respectable condition; the other a mere apology for an umbrella, full of holes, and rents, and broken joints, evidently in sad need of hospital care.

It was a quaint old shop, but not very attractive-looking. There was nothing in the umbrella-frames and bits of silk and alpaca to attract the gaze of any of the little street Arabs who passed by. None of them ever did look in at Umbrella Hospital; they always found a more attractive stand-point for gazing and longing in the confectioner's round the corner or the penny-pie shop over the way. No, no one ever cared to linger about the threshold of Joshua Henderson's shop. Certainly there was nothing to attract young eyes in its contents; they knew nothing—bless them!—about either

the conveniences or inconveniences of umbrellas, but it is to be doubted whether, if the shop had contained all that their young souls loved best in the shape of sweeties and cakes, they would have any more looked at them through the window, for it was a well-known fact that Joshua Henderson neither loved nor encouraged street Arabs, and this fact the street Arabs in question duly appreciated and respected. "Old Josh" they called him behind his back, but to his face they were so far respectful as to call him nothing.

On this particular afternoon Joshua came and stood in his doorway; by so doing he made more than one little street Arab, intent on plunder, feel very uncomfortable, so uncomfortable that he or she moved quietly elsewhere; and, except for occasional passers-by, Joshua had the coast clear. He had no particular work to do just then, and he thought the air would be cooler in the doorway. This was not so, however; sultry was the hot air that blew on his cheek, and sultry and dull the hot narrow street which formed his only view. Unpleasant odours from decaying fruit and vegetables were wafted to his nostrils, and in

the distance he heard, above the constant roar of London, the cries of babies and children, and the angry retorts of scolding women.

Altogether, sight, sound, and feeling were so disagreeably molested on that hot doorway that Joshua, with a slight sigh, once more left the coast clear for the little Arabs, and re-entered his shop. He had nothing in particular to do there; all the dilapidated umbrellas had been put to rights, and no new ones had come in to-day. He passed through the shop into his parlour, kitchen, and bedroom, which lay just beyond, and, opening the door wide, sat down in such a position that he could see if any one by any chance entered.

Into the very small parlour the sun's hot rays poured with a fierce power. In the coolest corner that Henderson could find, these rays found out his silver head and beat on it. This fact was not improving his already rather perturbed temper. There was, however, no help for the discomfort, and, with sigh number two, he took a book from the bookshelf over his head, in the hope that he might forget his bodily discomforts in the delights of mental exercise.

The little room was literally lined with books; not any of those bright and attractive-looking volumes which might possibly be found in a circulating library—no, Henderson's books were solemn tomes bound in calf, and the special volume he held in his hand was one of Plato's Discourses in its original tongue.

He read on with ease and fluency, turning the pages rapidly; and as he did so the little fretful lines disappeared gradually from between his eyes. He was communing with a great soul, and he felt rather disgusted with himself for still being so far behind Plato as to find the sun's rays on his head uncomfortable.

As he read, he so lost himself in the world of rich thought into which he had entered that he never noticed a very tiny shadow obstructing the light in his doorway. The shadow was so small that it made little difference in the amount of light which entered the shop, and Joshua never saw it. It was caused by the grotesque figure of a girl of eight—a girl dressed in a ragged gown, which barely reached to her knees, a large poke-bonnet on her head, and a very fat baby in her arms. She stood with her mouth a little, and her eyes very.

wide open, gazing hard at Joshua; but when he stirred his hand to turn a page of his book, she vanished round the corner.

Joshua read on for the next hour undisturbed by any customer. Then a man came in with two umbrellas, and he had to enter the shop to serve him.

He had made arrangements to have the umbrellas restored to their primitive health by an early hour on the following morning, and was about again to return to his book when another visitor came in. This time, however. it was no customer. Joshua, raising his eyes, recognised at a glance one of the hard-working curates of the church which he attended once every Sunday in his life. Joshua went to church simply because his father had been a Churchman, and had gone there before him; but he neither loved church nor clergymen, and was annoyed now by what he considered rather in the light of an intrusion.

He bade his visitor a curt "Good-morning," but instead of returning to his little parlour, and the dear company of his beloved book, he sat down at once in the shop, and began to mend one of the broken umbrellas. He did not do so, however, without first offering the curate a chair, who accordingly sat down by his side.

"The church ain't filling this hot weather, I guess, Mr. Judson," he said, darting a sly look at the clergyman. "Folks don't care to be grilled alive just to listen to a sermon."

"You are quite right, Mr. Henderson; except for a few regular attendants like yourself, the church is sadly empty."

A few other remarks of a desultory nature followed; old Henderson disagreeably dry and caustic, the curate trying to throw oil on the troubled waters.

At last, however, he broached the real object of his visit. He and his rector had a scheme on foot. Feeling the terrible and oppressive heat of this part of London so much themselves, they knew something of the sufferings of those who lived in cellars and attics. Many of the little children were dying from the heat, and close, bad air. These good men were raising money to send as many as possible of the children into the country for a short time.

They had made arrangements with cottagers in the country to receive them, and so well did they manage, that they found they could pay all expenses for a little child, for three weeks in the pure air of the country, for the trifling cost of fifteen shillings and sevenpence per head.

In this good work Henderson was most earnestly asked to join.

"Would he take the whole expense of a child on himself, or half the expense?" Mr. Judson had spoken eloquently; nor did he notice, until he was silent, the expression on Henderson's face.

"You will help us, Mr. Henderson, will you not?" he said, but rather more doubtfully.

"No, then, that I won't; and that's flat as flat can be," answered old Henderson. "You say, Mr. Judson, sir, as those brats want the country air. Well, and who else, I wonder, would not be glad of the country air just now? Those idle brats, that have no business in the world at all, as far as I can see, are they to be petted and pampered, when honest hard-working folk find it hard enough to live? No, sir. I can't afford the country for myself, though I find the heat anything but agreeable. So the town children must do without, as far as I'm concerned. That's my answer, sir; sorry not to make it more obliging."

"Thank you for a plain answer, however, Mr. Henderson. I'm sorry, too, that you cannot see matters in a different light. The children are God's children, and as such, we, who are older than they, cannot quite rid ourselves of responsibility concerning them. That is the light in which I view it; but, of course, I cannot expect other people to see through my glasses."

Then the curate took his leave, and old Henderson returned to his interrupted book

CHAPTER II.

HE was a hard old fellow enough, and quite accustomed to having subscriptions asked of If the subscriptions had anything to say to the lighting of the church, or pew rents, or such-like matters, he did not refuse to subscribe. He gave very little-and that little, ungraciously; but still, believing it was his duty to help in church matters, he did help. But when it came to the pure and simple question of assisting those of his fellow-creatures who were worse off than himself, there old Henderson was He would help no one but himself. lived-if ever a man in all this world did sofor himself alone. He had neither wife nor child. He had no near relations. He called it hard work, the supporting of himself by his little umbrella hospital; still, he did support himself, laying by also, week by week, a small sum which must come into use in the days when

he would be too old even to pursue this light employment any longer.

Occasionally he took something from this sum to buy a book—for books were his great passion; but even for books he did not often take away from his savings. At this moment he reflected with great satisfaction over the knowledge that he had very nearly thirty pounds put away in the savings-bank. This sum, with careful management, would go a long way towards the expenses of that time when he could not work, and would also give him a decent funeral.

The curate's visit had not made him at all remorseful for his abrupt refusal of a charitable call; but it set him thinking on the subject of money. He found he could no longer read Plato's Discourses—he put them down, and began to think.

Yes, he was a very hale and strong man. He was, in all human probability, likely to live to be old, perhaps very old; and every year he could put by a trifle—if he was careful.

Yes; but how could he be careful if he gave to all outside claims? How absurd and unreasonable it was of people, clergymen and such-like, to come to hard-working and poor folks like him, and expect them to give to all their absurd whims and fancies! And this last whim—was there ever anything more absurd? He, indeed, who spent all his own life in town, and never gave himself so much as one day's treat in the country, he was to send a dirty little street Arab there—for three long weeks this disagreeable child was to enjoy itself at his expense! It really was enough to make a man angry. That young Judson was growing quite intolerable in his demands. If this kind of thing went on much longer, it would end in his leaving this church, for he could not allow himself to be worried. See now, how the curate had spoiled his afternoon. Plato's Discourses had grown quite dull. He put the book back on its shelf, and went again to the street door.

He stood there for some time, looking up and down—not that he enjoyed this occupation, for the afternoon was hotter than ever, but simply because he was in no humour for reading, and the umbrella he had got to mend could keep until it grew dark. This time some ragged children just at the opposite side of the street were too much absorbed by their play—the

manufacture of mud-pies—to notice him or run away, as was their wont, at his appearance on the scene.

They formed a little group seated together on the pavement; two or three ragged boys, a girl or two, and, pre-eminent among them, the grotesque girl and the baby.

Old Henderson never could bear these "city brats," as he called them, and he liked to exercise the wholesome awe with which he generally inspired them.

On this occasion they were even more obnoxious than usual, reminding him of the curate's disagreeable visit, and his own spoiled afternoon.

"Cush! Get out of that!" he shouted to them, when he found that they did not stir. "Get away, you little brats, and leave the path clear for honest folks!"

As usual, his loud voice and stern aspect had the desired effect. The children did not care to play under old Henderson's eyes; they scattered like frightened hares, all except the grotesque girl and the baby.

"Get away! Follow your companions!" he called to her.

He was surprised, however, when, instead of the obedience he expected, keen black eyes gazed full at him, and a shrill, pert voice replied—

"I ain't a-going; this ain't your pavement, Mr. Umbrella Man, and me and the baby, we means to stay yere as long as we likes."

Henderson was too surprised and too dignified to make any answer to this; he stood in the doorway a moment longer, then went back into his shop.

The small girl gave a short laugh, which he heard as he went in. But then the baby began to cry, and she turned her attention towards it. As she did so, the pertness seemed instantly to die out of her tiny sharp face, and a look of tenderness to fill the black eyes, and to soften the hard little mouth.

"Don't 'ee, don't 'ee," she said, kissing and fondling the little one. "There, Lizar Hanne, I can't abear to hear yer cry." Her caresses seemed to soothe the baby, who presently fell asleep in her arms.

She held it listlessly on her lap, gazing straight before her. She was a very, very thin girl; her face was pale; the cheek-bones almost starting from the skin. As she watched the baby, she coughed once or twice.

"Yes, I be bad enough," she soliloquized aloud. "There ain't no manner o' doubt as I ain't up to the mark, and this 'ere 'eat seems to grind more strength from a body even than the cold." She gazed up at the sky. "Why, I'd real like it to rain fur a little bit; I'm fair athirst for sum'ut cool-like."

There was no sign of rain, however, in the fierce heat of the sun. It beat on the old poke-bonnet, and presently its owner, half tottering under the weight of the baby, staggered to her feet.

"I'm glad as I give old Umbrella a bit o' sarce, and druv him in," she said to herself. This fact seemed to give her great satisfaction, for she laughed shrilly, though she managed to hold the baby in such a position that it did not wake.

"I'll just go and take a look at the old 'un," she said again, and she crossed the street and once more peeped in at the door of the Umbrella Hospital. Henderson had returned to his little parlour, and Plato's Discourses lay on his knee; but he was not reading, he was sound asleep.

"My h'eyes!" said the small girl, and she came into the very centre of the open doorway to gaze more comfortably. As she did so, her sharp gaze took instant note of the furniture and the little shop and parlour.

"It do look cool," she said. "Wouldn't Lizar Hanne sleep sound in yere."

As she spoke, she pointed with her finger to a small wool rug.; seeing, in imagination, Lizar Hanne reposing peacefully on its softness.

Suddenly an idea darted through her brain. Why might she not place the baby there for half an hour? Henderson would be sure to sleep for an hour, perhaps for two hours, and it would be so nice for the baby to rest in a place which was by comparison so cool; and, oh! what a relief to her own aching arms!

No sooner thought of than acted on—grotesque bonnet, bare legs, fat baby, and all, entered the shop; from the shop they went to the parlour, and the fat baby was laid at old Henderson's feet.

"I'll be back fur the baby in 'arf an hour," said the girl as she scuttled away.

CHAPTER III.

OLD Henderson slept on, not comfortably as he would in bed, but in that uneasy fashion which an upright position and the constant jerking of the head forward induce.

This sleep was sure to produce dreams, and Henderson dreamt. His dreams were very annoying, their principal figure being the curate, while round him revolved the most disagreeable and repulsive-looking street children he had ever seen.

The curate was taking these children into the country; but as they went, they jeered at Henderson, and taunted him for contributing nothing to their enjoyment. Each of these children had the same style of voice and the same style of face as the grotesque girl who had refused to leave the steps at his bidding.

There were fat babies also in the group—heaps of fat babies—until it seemed to Hender-

son, that not only did each child hold a baby, but the fattest and largest was held by the curate himself; and they all—curate, children, babies—were going country-wise, and laughing at him as they went. He almost fancied himself back in the days of the Egyptian plagues, and that this plague of babies and children was sent for his special benefit.

From so unpleasant a sleep he presently awoke, smiled with relief at its being but a dream, and stretched himself in his old armchair. The day was a little cooler now; the sun had left his parlour, and no longer beat with fierce power on his head. He sat still for a moment before exerting himself to put down the kettle for tea.

What an unpleasant dream he had had! But what a good thing that it was but a dream, that he was not really surrounded by those dreadful fat babies and pert children! Why, were such things really to happen they would drive him mad. But, hark! What was that? He started forward, the perspiration even stood out on his forehead, for very, very close to him was a sound uncommonly like the sound he had heard so distinctly in his dream. It was the gurgling,

contented sound which a baby makes when it crows to itself and sucks its thumb.

Henderson bent forward, looked down; then, indeed, he sprang to his feet with an exclamation of horror, for there, on his own rug, lay a large, fat baby—no other than the baby of his dream. It would be impossible to describe what he felt when he saw this smiling, dimpled creature. He was absolutely afraid of it. He moved farther away and gazed at it. The baby was wide awake, had slept comfortably, and returned his gaze out of large and pretty eyes in the most placid manner.

"Then the dream was true, and I've got the plague?" he said.

The man felt really frightened, for how had that baby got there? He rubbed his hand over his forehead, as if to assure himself that he was not still dreaming; then returned Plato to his place among the ancients, and went to look once more at the baby. It was long past his tea hour, and he liked his meals like clockwork, but he absolutely forgot all about tea tonight.

Presently the baby, who had never ceased sucking its thumb and smiling at him, stretched

out two fat arms, with the unmistakable request that he would take her up.

Henderson stepped back another pace or two. What in all the world did the creature mean?

Now all babies are despots, and Lizar Hanne had been accustomed to have her requests obeyed. When Henderson did not at once respond to her invitation, she first of all pouted, then scowled at him, and finally set up a very loud and lusty cry.

"All the street will hear. I'll—I'll run away and leave it—or—no—I'll just take it and put it in the street. Whoever brought it in will come for it. 'Twas a mean, nasty joke. But I'll pay 'em out!"

He approached the crying child trembling. He lifted it into his arms. Strange to say, he did not do this awkwardly; his arms were strong, and the baby instantly felt comfortable. It stopped crying, smiled up into Henderson's face, and clutched hold of his silver beard.

Never had the man been in so strange a predicament, and never had he held so queer a creature in his arms. But the pretty blue eyes had a magic in them. He sat down in his armchair, and no longer thought of leaving the

baby in the street. He did not attempt to pet it or stroke it; he was still too much afraid that it would cry again; but he let one of his strong arms encircle it, while he said over and over to himself, "Is this what babies are like? I never saw anything so very queer."

After a time, however—still holding the baby in his arms—he got up and softly shut the shop door; and now it occurred to him that he might have his supper, and at the same time give the baby something to eat. He had not an idea how it should be fed or what it would like; but he was not quite such a savage as to let even so queer a thing as a baby starve. He laid it on the white wool mat again, and began to make preparations for tea.

He made the tea strong and good, and took a cup of the best to the baby. Lizar Hanne was not particular; but this hot and very bitter mixture was scarcely to her taste; she made wry faces, and after the first taste would have no more.

Henderson was in despair.

Just then a customer came into the shop. Henderson shut the parlour door hastily and went to her. She was a woman who kept a small pawn-shop, and Henderson used to mend the umbrellas which she purchased, for her to sell again. He knew that she had a lot of children. As she was leaving the shop, he said abruptly—

"How are yer babies?"

Never before had he asked her such a question—for his hatred to children was well known. She thought he had taken leave of his senses, more particularly as he followed up this question by asking her what she gave the "brats" for supper. She told him what they liked best was bread and milk, but that she could not often afford it; and then she went away, more than ever convinced that the owner of Umbrella Hospital had gone mad. Henderson. however, had got the information he wanted. He went back to his parlour, poured the remainder of what milk he allowed himself into a cup, broke some bread into it, and gave it to the baby. This meal it not only ate, but enjoyed, smiling between each mouthful at Henderson, and kicking lustily both fat arms and legs.

CHAPTER IV.

In the meantime, while all this strange scene was going on in Umbrella Hospital, the baby's little care-taker was having sufficiently exciting adventures of her own. She had faithfully promised herself to return in half an hour. She never meant old Henderson to awake and find the baby. She calculated shrewdly by her observation of other men of his age that he would sleep for an hour at least, and she thoroughly enjoyed the sensation of having no burden in her weary arms. She was quite right in saying that "she was not up to the marknot by no means up to the mark." Indeed, had any doctor seen her he would have said that the case was not hopeless, but that unless something soon was done to lighten the hardships of her lot, the tender little frame of only eight years would succumb-the cheeks grow thinner, the eyes brighter, until she died.

Heaps of other children were fading just in the same way all round her. She saw that the end to which these children so surely steered was death. She knew that she was going the same way. She did not, however, trouble her head much about the matter. She knew nothing, it was true, about the next world; but there were few things very enjoyable in this. Perhaps the next world would be better. On the whole she would like to try the next world. Those who were dead never looked burning with heat as she was burning now. Yes, she rather liked to believe she must soon die, but for leaving the baby.

She walked on in leisurely fashion. She did not intend to return to the wretched home her drunken aunt gave her until as late an hour as possible. She thought she might have another game at mud-pies with the children, and she sat down with the first of her companions she met for this purpose.

They were all busy over this congenial employment, when a tall girl who knew her, and who was hurrying by, suddenly, at sight of her face, stood still.

"Why, Jane H'Amarintha," she said, "ef this

ain't luck. I wor jest a-lookin' fur you. Yer aunt 'ave met wid 'er fait wid a vengeance. She wor jest crossing by Salt's public—a drop too tight, as usual—when a big dray came h'up and knocked 'er down. She wor h'all smashed h'up, and they 'ave tuk 'er to the 'orspitle."

"Is she—is she—dead?" asked Jane Amarintha.

"I 'spect she be by now. She wor h'all smashed h'up, I tell yer."

"Let's go to her," said Jane Amarintha.

The two girls set off running, the other children following at a little distance.

When they reached the hospital they were told that the wretched woman was dead. She had breathed her last without one gleam of returning consciousness, and almost immediately after her admission into the hospital.

"Why h'ever don't yer cry?" asked the tall girl of her little companion.

"'Cause I ain't sorry," answered Jane Amarintha. "She did nothink but wallop me. I ain't sorry one bit."

"But yer ha'n't no home now."

"I don't care."

"And wot 'ull come o' the baby-wot 'ull

come o' Lizar Hanne?" At these words a look of softening and feeling came over the hard little face of Jane Amarintha.

"Why, that ere babby's mine, now," she said, "and I must go fur it. I furgot my babby. I'm real glad as it is mine. Don't keep me, Polly. I left my baby in Umbrella Hospital."

She put swift wings to her little feet, and her companion, a very worthless kind of girl, soon gave up pursuing her.

But all these events—her walk to the hospital, her long delay there—had taken time; had taken, indeed, some hours; and by the time she reached Joshua Henderson's it was past ten o'clock. The little shop was closed, and every light out.

Intense excitement had kept her up till now; but now, at sight of the closed door, she suddenly found herself growing both faint and timid. She leant against the door-post, and the tears she had refused to shed for her drunken aunt ran freely down her thin cheeks.

What had become of her baby? Had that cruel old man put it into the street? Had he let her pretty baby die of hunger and hard treatment? After a time she ventured to

knock timidly at the door. There was no response. Then she walked down all the lanes and passages near, peering into every nook and dark corner, hoping and longing to see again the little fat bundle and pretty blue eyes.

Hour after hour was spent thus by the poor little girl, until at last, worn out, she sank down into a corner and slept.

CHAPTER V.

ALL that night, too, Henderson sat up—he sat up by his own bed—watching the sweet and sound sleep of a baby. He kept a light burning, and the light fell full on the soft and dimpled face.

The baby, fat though she was, and of low origin, was a pretty creature, and Henderson could not help noticing how the lashes lay on the cheeks, and how the fair hair curled on the little head.

No one knew what thoughts were passing in his mind as he watched by the little child. No one knew whether he was angry or pleased—whether he was softened or hardened by this strange thing that had happened to him.

As the morning broke, he once put out his hand, and softly touched the baby's little cheek. Then he went and opened his shop-door.

He found a child leaning up against the door-

post—a child who, when she saw him, raised her hands, fell on her knees, and said, in a piteous, shrill voice—

"Oh, please, kind Mr. Umbrella Man! where's my baby?—where's my Lizar Hanne?"

"The baby's here, little girl," said Henderson gravely. "You had no right to leave her with me—no right whatever. But the baby's safe enough." And he led Jane Amarintha to where the sleeping baby lay on his own bed.

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Now a strange and perverse thing happened immediately after this, showing the fickleness and inconstancy even of little baby maidens; for when Jane Amarintha, in a transport of delight, wanted to clasp the baby in her arms, Lizar Hanne refused the embrace, turned away from Jane Amarintha, and would allow no one to touch her but Mr. Umbrella Man.

When she got into his arms she ceased crying, clutched at his silver beard, and smiled triumphantly. But the queerest part of all was, that Henderson himself chuckled quite audibly, and sat down, with the baby in his arms, in his old arm-chair. There, seated at his feet in the early

summer morning, Jane Amarintha told him her story.

That very day the curate was much surprised by a visit from Joshua Henderson at his own home. Henderson came with a double subscription, a subscription to enable the curate instantly to send a baby and a little girl for three weeks into the country.

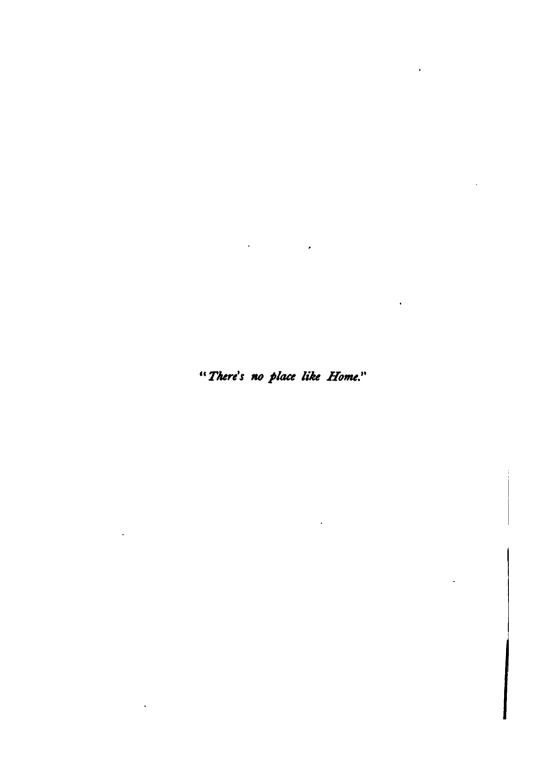
"And if the country agrees with them, why you let me know, Mr. Judson," he said in conclusion, "for I believe I can scrape together another pound or two for the young things; and be sure you tell me when they get back to London, for they are a pair of orphans, and no one ought to neglect orphans."

"But, Mr. Henderson! indeed, I thank you with all my heart; but may I ask—the fact is, you astonish me!—may I ask what has led you so completely to change your mind?"

Here old Henderson, looking more sly than shy, answered demurely, "It was all along of the 'cutest baby I ever met."

A WILD ROSE.

The Story of a berg short Visit to Fondon.



CHAPTER I.

On a certain evening in early spring, three little eager town children stood at a street window anxiously watching. They pressed their faces against the pane, they quarrelled a trifle, but, on the whole, so intent was their gaze outward that they had no time to bestow upon small disputes. The fact was this, the cause of their watching was the following: a country cousin, the only country cousin they possessed, was coming to pay them a visit—the first visit she had ever given them. They were all three regular town-bred children, and they expected great fun from the fact that an ignorant country child was coming to be quizzed by them. They were a selfish little set, and intended to make no end of fun out of their untrained country cousin.

"She must be here soon now," said Amy, aged twelve, a rather disagreeable little girl

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with sandy hair. "I have counted the time since father left, and they certainly must be here almost immediately."

"I don't think so," answered Harry. "You quite forget that the train may be a little late. I always make allowance for the train; but, of course, girls can't be expected to think of such things."

"All my toys are ready," whispered little Maude, "every one of them; all in such delicious order, and my baby-house washed out and so neat. Amy, are you sure she has never seen a baby-house before?"

But before Amy could answer this important question a cab drew up to the door. A shout of delight came from the children. A whispered "I told you so!" from the triumphant Amy, and the three little watchers were on the steps. The father was already helping to get down some luggage from the roof of the cab, while inside sat a tall, slight girl, in a blue cotton frock and a large straw hat. The hat was also trimmed with blue.

"Oh, let me help you out!" said Amy, coming forward with great politeness; "and, please, what's your name? Isn't it Mary?"

"Molly!" replied a very resolute voice; "I'm always called Molly. No, thank you; I don't want any help. If you just keep out of the way, I'll spring."

So saying, the agile new-comer leaped on to the steps, performing this action with such ease and grace that Harry was impelled to say "Hurrah!"

"What's that for?" asked the country Molly contemptuously. "Do you call that little jump anything? I'll soon show you what's what. See! I'll jump from this to the mat over there."

She did so amidst shouts of applause.

"Now, children, what's this about?" said the father, coming in. "Mary, my dear, I must warn you that there is an invalid in the house, and in consequence we never can indulge in much noise."

"Well, call me Molly, uncle, and I'll be as quiet as a mouse. If we all take off our shoes and stockings, may we go upstairs three steps at a time?"

"Yes, let's begin straight away," said Harry. They reached the upper landing in this fashion, where they sat down in a lump, the country cousin in the midst.

"Did you ever see a baby-house?" asked little Maude.

"Bless you, child! half a dozen," answered the imperturbable Molly; "they are houses where tiny babies keep their dolls, aren't they?"

Maude's little face grew blank; then she screwed up her mouth, her colour came and went, and she burst into tears.

"I don't believe she's a country cousin one bit," she sobbed.

Both Amy and Harry laughed, and did not attempt to comfort Maude; but, for the first time, the bright face of the country cousin grew blank. She coloured high, then, rising to her feet and taking little Maude in her arms, she said soothingly, "Come and show me that babyhouse at once." They went away together.

CHAPTER II.

THE country cousin and the town cousins were considerably astonished at each other; more particularly were the town cousins amazed, and, perhaps, a trifle disappointed. They had expected a flat, dull child, who would open her eyes and express surprise; who would be a little shy, very anxious to learn city ways, and, above all, who would never venture alone over a crossing. They found, instead, a very bright and fearless little girl, who it was certainly neither wise nor prudent to laugh at.

"Isn't she an oddity?" said Amy, when Molly walked off with little Maude in her arms. Amy looked anxiously into Harry's face as she spoke.

Harry burst out laughing.

"I say, she's a match for you, Miss Amy; and for my part, I mean to stick up for her. I think she will be very jolly."

Amy pouted, but said no more. That night, as little Maude crept into her elder sister's arms, she whispered, "I quite love Cousin Molly."

Meanwhile the country cousin, who had expected the new relations, whom she had often heard of but never seen, to be something like herself, but who had pronounced them instead "great little muffs," was sleeping peacefully.

She woke at dawn of day and looked around her. This little girl had never been from home before, and was rather bewildered by her first night in a town house. She opened her eyes wide, and gazed from object to object in the dingy room which she occupied.

"I don't like it," pronounced country Molly; "I don't like it one bit. Oh, dear! they are milking Daisy and Primrose at this moment at home, and my father is walking round the cornfield. How I wish I were with him! I wonder what o'clock it is?" She drew a small silver watch from under her pillow. "Why, I say, it is seven o'clock! They must have forgotten to call me. I'll jump up and look out."

She scrambled out of bed, and clambered on to the window-sill. A dingy and narrow street

lay before her. Some early passengers were walking by. A milkman came up the steps with a pail of milk; then a little girl came and sat near him, and began to arrange watercresses. Molly watched her dividing them into neat little bunches. The milkman went away; Molly gazed after him down the street; the little girl still sat on.

"I'll dress as quickly as possible, and run down and help that dear little thing with her cresses," whispered Molly to her own heart.

No sooner did this thought occur to her than she hastened to put it into execution. She plunged into her cold bath, put on her clothes, not in the tidiest fashion, and ran downstairs three steps at a time. The hall door was open, and she went out. Her little girl was gone. She stared with blank eyes up and down the street; suddenly her expressive little face brightened—she spied the watercress seller at the far end of the street. Using her fleet feet to some purpose, she soon reached the side of this yendor of small wares.

"Are they all made up?" she asked in a disappointed voice.

[&]quot;Eh?" answered the watercress seller.

"I'll help you to make up more bundles," said Molly. "I got up on purpose. Let me, please!" Here she laid her hand with great earnestness on the ragged girl's thin arm.

"I thought as yer were come to buy," replied the seller of cresses contemptuously. "I doesn't want yer to mak' up no bundles. I knows 'ow I likes my h'own cresses settled." She moved off in a huff, and Molly gazed after her in some dismay.

"Oh, dear!" sighed the country child; "the town is very dull."

She returned slowly homewards. Many people stared at her bright little face, unhidden by any hat or covering. An old gentleman passed her, who said, "Good morning, my pretty little dear."

"Good morning, sir," answered Molly; then, seeing that he stopped, attracted by her voice, she added, "Please, sir, I'm very dull; may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, my little love."

"Why do people tell so many lies about the town?"

"Lies, my dear? Bless me, what an odd child! I don't understand you, my dear."

"They do tell lies!" continued Molly stoutly. "They say there's such heaps of fun in town; 'tisn't true—there's no fun. I came up last night, and I never saw any place so stupid."

"You have not seen town yet; 'tis a very lively place," said the old gentleman. Then he nodded to her, hoped she would quickly change her mind, and walked away to his own employment. "Poor innocent little girl!" he said to himself.

Molly sighed and entered the house. The front door was shut, but she went down the area steps, and found herself in the kitchen.

"Oh, cook, I am hungry!" she said to that astonished woman. "I do think town folks are lazy; why, breakfast would be over an hour ago at home."

Here Molly sighed profoundly.

"Well, my dear, it won't be over for an hour to come here," replied the cook. "We never breakfasts here until it 'ave gone nine; and, indeed, it is sometimes close upon ten before the family makes their appearance. They're a very respectable fam'ly, is ours," continued cook.

Molly sighed; she was too hungry to care for this fact.

"Oh, dear!" she repeated, her round face growing very disconsolate, "I want my breakfast."

"Poor dear! She 'ave bin h'up fur an hour and more," said the housemaid, as she proceeded to lay out the kitchen cups and saucers. "Why can't she have a bite and a sup with us, cook?"

"No reason in the world, if she don't peach on us," said cook.

"Look here, missy: we'll give yer some'ut to eat in the kitchen, if you don't tell,"

"Who am I not to tell?" asked Molly. "I'd love some jam, or anything very nice, cook. I think 'tis dear of you to think of it; and I hope breakfast will be ready very soon indeed. But who am I not to tell?"

"Why, the missus and the master, and the young ladies and gentlemen upstairs, missy. 'Twould be as much as my place was worth ef so be they knew, I can tell you."

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"But why?" persisted Molly. "This is not such a bad kitchen—that is, for a town, I mean. And I should not mind a bit taking my break-

fast in it. I think you are very nice, too, and Hannah—is that Hannah? I like Hannah. I often have a bit of breakfast in the kitchen at home. Why am I not to tell?"

"The poor dear!" said Hannah, as she served up some sputtering bacon and grilled chicken, "'tis plain to be seen she 'ave real country ways—no nonsense, nor up-ish manners. Well, our young friends is gentry and no mistake; but somehow, I don't know—"

As Hannah uttered the last words in a rather dubious tone, she could not help glancing with admiration at the pretty round face and wideopen brown eyes of the country child.

"Lor, cook," she said, going up to Molly, "ain't her 'air real beautiful. Why, I could curl up this 'air; it ain't like Miss Amy's—h'all straight, and like so much tow. Let me put it in papers for yer to-night, missy."

"No, thank you," answered Molly, shaking her wild mane of fair locks free from Hannah's touch. "I hate hair in curls, and papered. Oh, not for worlds! Please, cook, may I have a bit of breakfast now?"

"Yes, dear," answered cook, "you shall have plenty; only don't peach."

"I don't know what peaching means," answered Molly; "but—— Oh, dear! I am hungry."

She forgot her scruples, and, seating herself on the edge of one of the kitchen chairs, was soon absorbed in the mysteries of town bread and butter and marmalade.

Meanwhile cook and Hannah quickly forgot all about her in the interest of their own conversation.

"'Tis my belief 'tis all fancy about 'the missus," said Hannah. "She's lazy and likes to lie abed, and fur master to make a deal on her. Dear, ain't she crotchety? And her temper, there's no abiding of it."

Neither cook nor Hannah observed that Molly had suspended her bread and butter in mid-air, and was looking at them with round eyes full of indignant wonder.

"Miss Amy takes after her ma," continued the housemaid, helping herself to a fresh slice of buttered toast. "A nasty spiteful thing is Miss Amy, and no mistake. Oh, I can't abide her! She's h'always a-spyin' round, and making up tales for her ma. Why, it was only vesterday that—"

"Hush!" said cook in a low voice, raising a warning finger, for she had caught a glimpse of an expression she did not like on country Molly's face. "Have another cup of tea, missy?" she said in a very deferential tone, addressing the little stranger.

"Not for all the world!" answered Molly, her tongue and passionate little heart suddenly finding voice. "I would not touch another bit of food in the kitchen. This is not like the home kitchen, and you two are not the least like Sukie and Anne. They would not speak against my father and me. If they did not like us they'd go away. I wonder you don't go away. I think you're mean."

So saying, she rose from her seat, never observing that the chair, improperly balanced, fell with a bang on the floor, left her untasted marmalade and bread and butter, and ran upstairs.

For half an hour she sat all alone, her face pressed against one of the dingy window-panes in the dining-room. She was not, however, absorbed watching the passers-by; she was thinking hard. At the end of half an hour her uncle came downstairs. He kissed her, and asked her how she had slept.

"Like a top, thanks," answered Molly gravely.

"But you look tired, my little girl. Are you quite well?"

"I'm quite well," answered Molly. "I have been up some time."

"Ah! poor little country lassie, you must be hungry."

"Yes, uncle," said Molly, "I'm hungry; but I should have been hungrier if I had not had a little bit of breakfast with the cook and Hannah in the kitchen."

"Oh, my dear! in the kitchen! Your aunt would not like that; she never allows her children to visit the kitchen. You must not go there again."

"I'm not a bit surprised at my aunt forbidding the children to go to the kitchen," answered Molly, "and I won't go there again."

Something in Molly's tone caused her uncle to raise his brows with some surprise, but the entrance of Amy, Harry, and little Maude prevented his making any comment. Little Maude ran to Molly at once, and Harry, after looking at her hard, demanded, in an abrupt tone, how she liked the town now.

"I don't like it at all," answered Molly.

"Well, you are rude," said Harry. "Don't you know that we live in a town? 'Tis very rude of you, when you are on a visit with us, to say you don't like it."

"She's country-bred; she can't help it, you know," said Amy.

"I'm very glad I'm country-bred, if it prevents my being like you," answered Molly, very loud, her eyes flashing and cheeks flaming.

"Oh, come, children, don't quarrel," said the uncle and father.

At breakfast it was arranged that the children should have a holiday in honour of their cousin, and many places of amusement where they would spend the day were discussed.

"I want to see the wild beasts," said Molly.
"I want to hear the lions roar. My father says it makes one tremble to hear the wild beasts roar. I should like to go to see them best."

"It may make you tremble," retorted Harry, "but it will not me. Pooh! the noise those lions make is a mere nothing; only a baby would be afraid."

"In that case it won't affect me," said Molly,

"But please, uncle, may we go?—unless," she added, "all the others want to go to some other place awfully badly."

"No, they don't, Molly," replied her uncle; "and, in any case, you, as our little guest, have permission to choose for yourself. Is not that so, Harry?"

"Yes, father; let us go to the Zoological Gardens, if Molly wishes it."

"Thank you, Harry," replied his country cousin with a smile. "I did promise my father that I would tell him about the wild beasts."

"You must come upstairs to be introduced to your aunt now," said her Uncle George.

He took her hand and led her from the room. As they mounted the stairs together an uncomfortable feeling came over Molly. It was not fear; it could not be that, which she had never experienced in all her life. Still, something caused her heart to beat very fast.

"Uncle," she whispered in an awestruck voice, "is my aunt so very ill?"

"By no means, my little girl. She is not strong, but I daresay she will look all right to you."

Then it occurred to Molly that perhaps the

servants—though it was very wicked of them to say it—were right in what they said.

Molly's aunt received her affectionately. As her uncle had said, she did not look at all ill to the little girl. She had a high colour in her cheeks, and her eyes were very bright. She spoke, however, in a fretful key, and whatever she suggested, her husband flew to do at once.

In a few moments Molly and her new aunt were alone. She kissed Molly, and asked her a great many questions, and made her stand by her side.

But all the time as she spoke, it was flashing through and through her troublesome little auditor's mind that perhaps the servants were right—perhaps her aunt was only pretending to be ill, in order to make Uncle George wait on her. Molly did not like this thought at all, and as she stood and tried to listen to what her aunt was saying, she could not help frowning. Mrs. Ashley noticed the contraction on the pretty forehead, and inquired the cause.

"What is troubling you, my love?"

"Please, Aunt Amy, I am thinking about you."

"Indeed, my dear! Your thoughts don't

seem to be very pleasant ones. Are you making up your mind not to like your new aunt?"

"No, Aunt Amy; I think I should like you—I am sure I should like you—if—if——"

"Well, my dear, if what?"

"If—if—Aunt Amy, are you positive that you are very ill?"

"My dear!"

Mrs. Ashley's colour did indeed flash brightly, and she gazed at Molly with some indignation and surprise.

"My dear," she said, "I don't understand you. You ask me if I am positive that I am ill? Please explain yourself."

"I will," said Molly. "I hope you won't be angry with me; but I thought—I mean—I mean—you see, Aunt Amy, you have such a pretty colour, and your eyes are so bright, and I thought that every one who was ill was pale and dull-looking. Perhaps, Aunt Amy, if you were to try very hard you might find that you could walk, and could come downstairs. I am sure my uncle would like you just as much if you were well. If I ask him to, will you try being well for a little bit? It would be so pleasant to have you downstairs.

"He would like me just as much if I were well," repeated Mrs. Ashley, in a strange voice, speaking half to herself. "Just as much if I were well; perhaps better, and the children better. Unfortunately, people cannot choose about being well. No, Molly; you are mistaken, my dear. Some people are ill who have a colour and bright eyes. I am one of those. But run away now; you are a strange child; I don't want to talk to you any more for the present."

CHAPTER III.

MOLLY saw that she had hurt her aunt very much, and as she went slowly from the room and mounted the stairs to her own little chamber, she felt desolate.

"Oh, dear! how horrid the town is," she said to herself. She sat down on her trunk, which was still unpacked, pressed her elbows on her knees, and her fat cheeks on her dimpled hands, and began to think very hard indeed. "Oh, dear!" she sighed again; "how very unpleasant the town is. I know Sukie is feeding the chickens at this very minute at home, and father will soon be coming in to his lunch. won't have me to kiss him to-day. I wonder will father be sorry? Nobody here wants me to kiss them, and I'm sure I don't want to, for they're all horrid. I might like Harry if he'd let me, and perhaps little Maude, but I never could get on with Amy. I'm so glad I'm not

a town child! What unpleasant servants they have here, not a bit like Sukie and Annie: and my uncle-well, he looks always puzzled about something. I wonder what is the matter with him; he has not a bit father's nice, happy face. Perhaps it is my aunt who puzzles him, and gives him all those wrinkles. Oh, dear! my aunt was angry with me; I'm sorry I hurt her. I know I did hurt her, for her eyes looked as if tears would come in them any minute. I'm sorry I said anything. I suppose she really is dreadfully ill. Poor Aunt Amy! I'm sorry I said what I thought-father always let me say out everything, but then that was in the country. I won't stay here for a month-I won't "-at this juncture in her sorrowful musings Molly felt something damp against her cheek. She removed her hand from the said cheek and looked at it earnestly. She soon perceived that there was a little channel from her eye to this cheek and hand, and down that channel a tear had quickly rolled.

On making this discovery she jumped to her feet: "Crying, I declare!" exclaimed country Molly, addressing herself in a tone of withering scorn. "Well, what a baby! I don't know what's the matter with me to-day. I believe I did not say my prayers half strong enough this morning. Well, I'll just say 'em again."

She went on her knees, covered her face, and repeated "Our Father" with great feryour.

"That's a dear prayer," said Molly to herself. "It helps me ever so. Now I know what I'll do; I'll write a letter home. Father will like to get a letter, and I can use my new desk."

This happy thought caused Molly to give a little skip of delight. She pulled her trunk open, threw its contents helter-skelter on the floor, and drawing out her new desk, she opened it on her knee, and finding paper, pen, and ink, began to write in a round, childish hand:—

"DEAR FATHER,"-

After writing these two words, Molly suspended her pen in mid-air, and began to think hard. "Shall I tell him that I'm very unhappy?" This was her thought. Finally, with no small effort, she determined *not* to tell her father. "It will make him feel bad," she said to

herself. She heaved a great sigh, squared her shoulders, grasped her pen very firmly, and after half an hour's hard labour, produced the following letter:—

"DEAR FATHER,-

"We are going to the Wild Beast Show very soon. Harry says they don't roar much, and that only a baby would think so. That can't be true, father, for you said they did roar; but I'll soon know. The servants here are not as nice as Sukie and Anne, and I don't like Harry and Amy half as well as the ducks and chickens at home. Maudie is nice, though. I think I could like Maudie nearly as well as my white pup. How are the chickens and the hens, and Ponto and Nero, and the cows, and little Starbright, the calf? How is everybody? Don't you want a kiss very much?

"Your own MOLLY."

This letter had barely reached its completion when eager children's voices were heard approaching, and Harry, Amy, and Maude ran into the room. Molly hid her letter under a piece of blotting-paper, and turned to greet her cousins.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"What's the matter? why, we are ready to go, that's what's the matter. Here, put on your hat and let us be off," exclaimed Harry.

"But she must tidy herself," said Amy. "Haven't you got another frock?"

"Yes, in the bottom of the box," answered Molly; "but 'tis the same as this. What's the matter with this? 'tis quite clean."

"Yes, it is, and very pretty too," remarked Harry, regarding Molly's blue cotton frock with satisfaction. "Here, do tie on your hat and let's be off. Oh, I say, what a jolly desk!"

"I don't care to go to the Gardens with a child in a cotton frock," said Amy, in a tone of much disdain.

"You never are much fun, Amy, and I'm sure Moll looks as nice as possible. May I see your desk, please, Molly?"

"Yes, Harry; but Amy may not, for it might spoil her frock if she were to stoop a bit. Father never would allow me to wear silk frocks; he always said they were affected things for little girls to put on."

Harry roared with laughter, and Amy's little

face became very black indeed. She did not want to begin a war of words with Molly, for she saw she was no match for her, but the dislike she had taken from the first moment of her arrival to her country cousin grew strongergrew so strong, indeed, that naughty Amy began to plan how she could annoy Molly. As a first step she determined to look at the new desk, and to gratify her curiosity by examining its contents. She did not dare to do this openly, but, alas! Amy could stoop to artifice. own little bedroom was next to Molly's. made some excuse to go into it when Molly, Harry, and Maude went downstairs, listened until their receding footsteps had died away, then darted back into Molly's room. It did not take an instant to secure the desk, to pull it open, and to rifle the contents. The first thing her eyes lighted on was Molly's letter to her father. She read it through. Voices called her from below. Scarcely knowing what she was doing, she shut up the desk and thrust the letter into her pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

As they drove to the Zoological Gardens, Molly noticed that her uncle was silent and wore a more puzzled look than ever. This look roused her curiosity and pity so much, that at the first opportunity she could not help asking Harry the cause.

- "Why, don't you know?" answered Harry. "'Tis all because of you."
 - "Because of me!" said Molly, in amazement.
- "Yes, of course; you have been saying such funny things to mother. Why, mother has been crying—and she spoke to father. I really believe she thinks that father got you to say the things."
- "Oh, but he didn't," answered Molly, her face crimson with distress and shame. "Oh, indeed, indeed, it was by quite another way I came by the thought. I'm so sorry I said anything! Oh! poor Uncle George!"

"There's no good being sorry when you do mischief," answered Harry, with the air of a philosopher. "All the sorrow in the world won't undo the mischief; and it seems to me, Moll, that you are the kind of girl who will always put her foot into it."

"What is that?" asked Molly. "I don't know what you mean!"

"Why, it means that you'll always be getting into mischief—hot water, you know."

"Oh, that's easily explained," said Molly. "It's because I'm country."

"Because you are country?"

"Yes, and country can't get on in the town. No, it never can get on in the town. But I say, Harry," suddenly changing her tone to one of great earnestness, "is there nothing I can do to make uncle and aunt one again? May I go and speak to my uncle, and tell him it was all a mistake, and ask him to keep on being kind to my aunt, even though she is—I mean that she can't help being ill?"

All the time Molly was speaking, Harry kept gazing at her with ever-increasing wonder. When her voice ceased, and her earnest, honest brown eyes looked steadily into his, he could not help standing still, so great was his astonishment.

"There is no doubt you are country," he said. "I'd advise you not to try that cheeky speech with father. You have been cheeky enough with mother as it is. I don't know what idea you have got about father and mother. Why, they love each other dearly, and poor mother would give anything to be well, only she can't."

"Then I would not keep such——" began Molly; but before she could get to the word "servants," and so solve the mystery of much that perplexed her little cousin, her uncle's voice was heard calling both the children to look at some flamingoes.

Meanwhile Amy walked behind with little Maude, and occupied herself with some very bitter and naughty thoughts. Molly's letter, which she had read, was by no means calculated to soften her feelings towards her cousin. In this letter Amy found herself compared, and not favourably, to common-place ducks and chickens—doubtless most vulgar ducks and chickens—living on a country farm. This candour of Molly's was by no means pleasant

to vain little Amy. She had not thought about her cousin liking her very much, but she had expected her to envy and admire. It was quite plain that country Molly, in her dreadful cotton frock, did neither.

And there now was she, walking on with Harry and making friends with him. Oh! how little Harry knew, as he talked and laughed with her, what her real thought was! Was it likely that he would make himself so pleasant to a girl who compared him to ducks and hens? Amy would have given all the world to tell Harry what Molly had written about them both to her father; but to do this she must betray her own meanness in reading and hiding the letter. This was the last thing she wished. Indeed, she could not help reflecting with some dismay on the difficulty of getting back the letter unobserved into Molly's desk. But the news she possessed and longed to communicate made her look cross and preoccupied, and little Maudie, finding she had nothing to tell her about any of the wild beasts, quickly left her and ran on to join her father and Harry and Molly. Amy was thus left alone. But, for the present at least, the others

were much too excited to notice this fact. They had now reached the lions' house, and Molly, her heart beating fast, though by no means with fear, was gazing at the noble beasts. They certainly did not frighten her, but they excited her to the highest degree.

"You must not go too near, Molly," warned her uncle. But Molly was deaf to all words. She pressed close to the railing which guards the cages, and when one angry lion lashed himself with his tail and uttered his great forest thunder, she could not help screaming with delight.

"Oh! Harry, it does not frighten me a bit," she said. But Harry, his face a little pale, had withdrawn to a respectful distance. Molly felt that she could gaze at the lions all day, and was a little cross when her uncle at last insisted on their leaving the house.

"Now that was good. That was worth seeing," she confided to Harry. "That was worth coming up from the country to see. My father was right. A person must be very brave not to tremble when the lions roar; but country people are brave."

Harry felt that Molly was looking at him a

little contemptuously, and he knew that she had noticed how far he had kept from the cages.

"I wish you would not be so boastful," he said. "You talk in that way simply because you do not know what the danger is. Why, those lions could eat you up—oh! just in a mouthful."

"Yes, I do know," answered Molly; "I know hundreds of stories about wild beasts. But I am not going to be afraid of them when they are in cages, for all that."

Molly walked along, tossing her little head, and feeling a good deal conceited. And Harry, as he looked at her, scarcely for the moment liked her better than Amy did.

But just at that moment there was an exclamation from the father and little Maude, "Where was Amy?"

All stood still and looked at each other in some consternation. They had forgotten Amy utterly, and now she was not with them. They retraced their steps in some uneasiness, for the Gardens are quite large enough for a child to lose herself in them. But though they inquired of many people, no one had seen a little girl in a peacock green silk frock anywhere.

Mr. Ashley became really uneasy, and Maudie began to cry.

"Let me run, uncle," said Molly; "I'll run and call out, so that she is sure to hear me; and I'll come back to the big lion house, so that you'll know where to find me."

Before her uncle could possibly find words to answer her, the little country girl was off, almost on the wings of the wind. Molly ran until she was quite out of breath. Then she walked, calling her cousin as she did so, and looking eagerly from right to left. As she looked for Amy, her heart began to reproach her a little about Amy. She certainly did not care for that vain little girl. But she felt that her father would not have quite liked the words she had addressed to her about her silk frock. Molly had not acted according to the teachings of her kind father when she had so spoken. She remembered now that Amy had looked very grave, and had seemed scarcely happy as they all rode in the omnibus to the Gardens. It was not Molly's wish to make any one unhappy, "Though I seem to be doing it," she reflected, with a sigh, remembering her Uncle George's face. "I can't set that right, it seems," she said to herself; "but I'll soon make it up with Amy."

Scarcely had she spoken the words, when she came upon a solitary little figure standing with its back to her, gazing at some wild water-fowl. This little figure was arrayed somewhat gaily in a peacock green silk. Ah! no doubt it was Amy.

Molly uttered a glad cry, ran up to her cousin and took her arm.

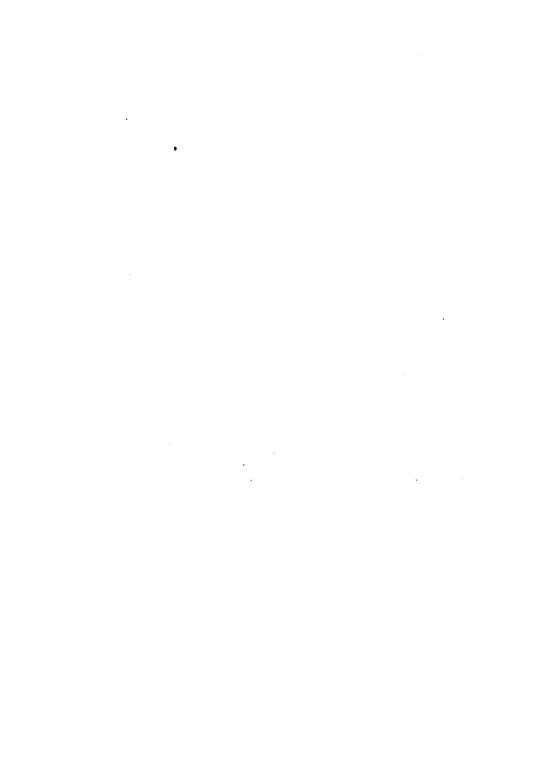
"O Amy! I'm so pleased; I did want to find you. Why, what a fright you have given us all! Where were you? Did you not come into the lion house? I forgot you really, Amy, when I saw the lions. Oh! they are just darlings. Why did you not come to see them, Amy? Were you afraid? But come now, we must go back to the lion house. My uncle is in such a fright about you." Here Molly began to drag Amy, but Amy firmly resisted this treatment.

The fact was, when she had found herself really alone, she had stood still for a moment or two outside the lion house, but the roar from the great beast which had so delighted Molly had filled her with so much terror and dismay that she had fled from the spot, screaming and in wild alarm. Thus she had lost her way, and was truly a most forlorn little girl when Molly at last found her. But though Amy was very glad to be found, she was not glad to be found by Molly. She believed all her fright and misery to be caused by Molly. And now, when Molly proposed going back to the lion house, she believed her stronger cousin was really going to drag her into the house with those dreadful creatures.

"I won't come with you. Don't touch me, don't touch me!" she screamed in real terror.

"Why, Amy, you look so queer. Do you think I'm going to hurt you? As you are a coward, we won't go into the lion house; but I promised my uncle that I would bring you back to the door, and if we don't go back there, he won't know where to find us, and then, perhaps, we should both be lost. You would not like to be lost with me, you know, Amy?"

Certainly Amy would not like that. She also reflected that it was probably very nearly lunch time, so she condescended to walk slowly in the direction of the lion house with her





"Don't touch my frock."

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cousin. She moved along, however, so very slowly that Molly grew impatient.

"Can't you come a little faster?" she said, catching hold of the grand silk frock.

Amy pulled it angrily from her hot and not over clean little fingers.

"Don't touch my freck," she said. How can you? There! you have messed it. I knew you would."

"Well, come faster, and I won't touch you," said Molly.

"I can't—I'm too hot. You may go on alone."

Molly stood still, gazing at her cousin, then burst out laughing.

"You could not find your way," she said, "If I were to take you at your word, which really I have a good mind to do; you'd get lost again. Do you know, Amy," she continued, "that you are very cross? You can't think what an unpleasant face you have got on. If you were father's little girl, I am sure he would punish you. Perhaps he'd lock you up for the rest of the day. He has done that to me when I've been very naughty. 'Tis lucky that you are only with me, Amy, for you see I can't

punish you. Why can't you be pleasant and friendly?" she continued; "'twould be so much nicer. I'm sorry I said that about your frock, Amy; that was not right of me. Come, Amy, forgive me, and let's be friends."

Again Molly laid her hand on Amy's shoulder, and looked into her face with honest eyes. But Molly's whole speech had aggravated Amy's already much perturbed temper. She was now in a regular passion, and said what the next moment she would have given worlds to recall.

"Don't touch me," she said; "I will never be friends with you—never. Do you think I would make it up with a girl who compares me to ducks and chickens?"

"Amy!" said Molly.

There was something in the tone in which Molly said that one word which recalled Amy to herself. She stood still and looked at her cousin in some alarm. In truth she had reason for her fear, so great was the change in Molly's face. It was perfectly pale; her eyes gleamed; her lips trembled. For nearly a moment after uttering that one word she was silent; she was evidently struggling hard not to speak. At last she said in an odd, shaky tone—

"You read my letter. If you have my letter in your pocket, please give it to me."

She came a step nearer. Amy put her hand into her pocket, took out the letter and threw it on the ground. Molly picked it up and went instantly away.

CHAPTER V.

MOLLY ran as fast as her legs could carry her—the one desire, the one strong wish in her heart being to put as wide a distance between herself and Amy as possible. So dreadful was the feeling she now had about Amy that she believed it safer for Amy that she should not be near her.

"I might beat her, and she's a weak, poor thing," gasped the excited child.

At last, from absolute want of breath, she was obliged to stop and rest. But though she stood motionless for fully five minutes, her heart still beat hard, and ungovernable anger still filled her whole little nature. Poor Molly! The lecture she had just read to Amy she could not at all apply to herself. She stood trembling, pressing the crumpled letter to her hot face, and thinking hard.

"Father says people ought never to get into

I know I am in one now. Father says they are always wrong. Always! Father did not think what a big word 'always' was. He did not suppose that it could ever possibly mean having a letter that was written by me to him read and stolen-stolen out of my own new desk. Amy must have been stealing my letter when she stayed upstairs so long after Harry and Maude and me. Oh, how can I face her again! how can I speak to her again! I can't; I won't. Why did I ever leave my dear darling father and come to the town? How horrid the town is! how I do hate the town! Father said it would do me good to see my cousins and all the gay sights; but I have seen no gay sights except the lions (I liked them). And my cousins—they have only made me feel bad. They are town, and I am country. don't understand them, nor they me; and since I came to the town I have done nothing but mischief. I really did not mean it; but all day long I have just been making everybody unhappy. Oh, must I stay for a month? I won't stay for a month. Why can't I go away at once? Yes, I will! I will!"

This thought and resolve had scarcely come

to Molly before she heard voices and footsteps approaching. She knew them—they belonged to her uncle and cousins. Instantly she stepped behind a tall shrub, which completely hid her little person, and peeped through the thick branches. Amy had rejoined the group. She was talking quickly, sobbing as she spoke. Harry was looking eagerly from right to left (how Molly feared he would discover her). Maude was saying, "Where can she be hiding?" and her Uncle George was walking along with a very anxious face. There was something in her uncle's expression which would at another time have instantly soothed and softened Molly's heart. But she was too much absorbed with herself and her own wrongs to notice it now. Besides, the delightful idea of running away and getting back to her beloved father was taking firmer and firmer possession of her mind.

When her uncle and cousins had quite gone out of sight, Molly softly left her hiding-place, and saw, to her great joy, that she was very near one of the entrances. At the gate stood a tall policeman. This person Molly addressed in some trepidation.

- "Please, sir, what's the right way to go from here to Seabright?"
- "Seabright in Surrey do you mean, my little girl?"
- "Yes, 'tis Surrey," replied Molly, with a questioning look on her face. "I remember quite well now. 'Tis in Surrey in my geography lesson."
- "And you want to go there? But 'tis a good way off."
- "Oh, I don't mind that. I want to get back to my father."
- "Your father—oh! Well, you must take a cab and drive from here to Waterloo Station, and then if you ask one of the officials, he will put you into the right train for Seabright. Would you like me to call a cab for you?"
- "Oh yes, sir, please, very much indeed. How kind you are."

The policeman smiled; and, raising his whistle to his lips, a hansom drew up, into which he helped Molly to get.

"You must give the man a shilling," he said.
"Have you got a shilling?"

Molly nodded, and the cabby quickly drove her out of sight. For a moment or two the policeman wondered if he had done right in letting so young a child go off alone, without at least questioning her further. But having many duties to attend to, and many other things to think of, he quickly forgot all about her.

CHAPTER VI.

AT nine o'clock that same evening a middleaged man was seated alone in a comfortable farmhouse kitchen. There was a great fire on the old-fashioned hearth. The man sat in an arm-chair made of the blackest oak, and a little table of the same wood was drawn close to his side. On the table stood a reading-lamp, and around the lamp numerous newspapers, periodicals, and Mudie's books were scattered. Under the man's feet was a thick Turkey rug. Bright pewter, polished to the last degree of brilliancy, flashed from the walls, and many flitches of bacon hung from the ceiling. Altogether this farmhouse kitchen presented an odd but pleasant medley of rural simplicity and Comfort evidently reigned here. refinement. and the cricket which sang loudly on the hearth completed the charm.

The man, too, had a nice face—kind, thought-

ful, intelligent. In the honest grey eyes, however, there was a certain look of loneliness. Even the book he read could not quite disperse this expression. He threw it from him almost impatiently after a moment or two.

"My dear little one! I wonder how she is getting on. I do miss her. Fancy, living without Molly for a month! But it would have been selfish to have kept her from so much enjoyment."

He sighed, rose from his seat—for the great eight-day clock in the corner had just struck the half-hour, and it was time for him to go round to see that the beasts were comfortable for the night. A little noise, however, at the lattice window first drew his attention. It was something as if a bird had pecked at the framework, and he wondered if one of Molly's pigeon's had failed to go to roost as usual. He went up to the window, then started back in mingled A little face was consternation and delight. pressed against the pane—a little face with honest, wide-open brown eyes, framed in by a great mass of golden, untidy hair, for Molly's hat had fallen off.

[&]quot;My child!" said the father.

He opened the window, and Molly sprang into his arms.

"Oh, I have been so miserable, and I'm so happy now!" sobbed the poor little runaway.

* * * * * *

Clasped very tight in her father's arms, with her head on his breast, Molly told all her story.

"Have I been very naughty?" she asked, in conclusion.

"It was certainly wrong of you to run away; and, well, excepting for that, and your getting so angry with poor Amy, I think you were only a little indiscreet."

- "What is indiscreet, father?"
- "Not very wise, my darling."
- "I'm so small to be wise," sighed Molly.
- "You are not very big, certainly. Now will you have some supper?"
- "Oh yes, please! And may I eat it on your knee, and think myself a great baby just for once?"

When she had finished a basinful of delicious country bread and milk, Molly began to feel the effects of her day's excitement.

"I'm ever so sleepy now. May I say my prayer, too, on your knee, father?"

"Yes, my darling."

Molly began the Lord's Prayer; suddenly she stopped.

"Why, I can't say it," she exclaimed.

"Why not?" asked her father.

"I can't say that part about 'forgive us our trespasses,' for I don't forgive Cousin Amy."

"Oh, my little Molly! is your short visit to the town really going to do you such harm that you are going to cherish hate in your heart to any one?"

"I'm afraid it is, father. I can't forgive her. She read your letter, you know."

Molly's father looked very grave.

"Why don't you speak?" asked Molly.

"I won't say anything now. Perhaps you will feel differently in the morning. Now my little girl had better go to bed."

"Are you very sorry to have me back again, father?"

"No, no; I have missed you, and I believe the country is the best place after all for my wild rose."

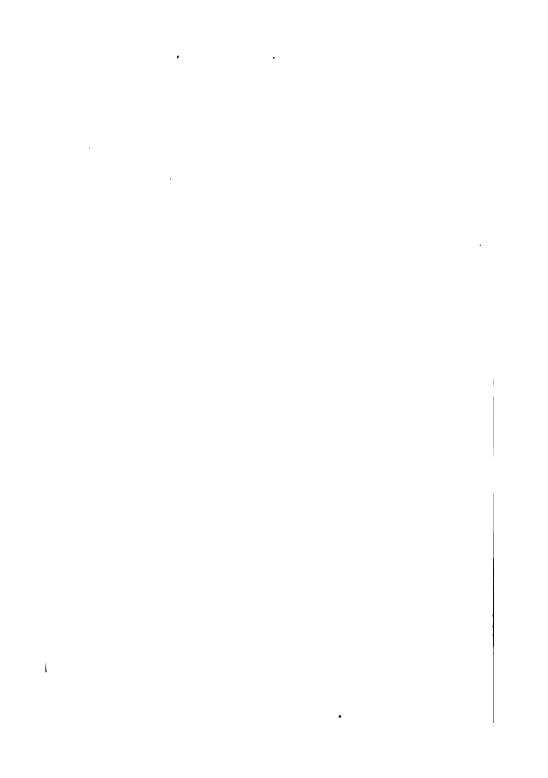
"Why, of course, dad; you never saw a wild

rose growing in a town," answered Molly, clasping her arms round his neck, with a great ecstatic hug.

By the first train in the morning Uncle George appeared, and when Molly saw his white and troubled face, and learned what he and her aunt and cousins—more particularly poor Amy—had suffered on her account, she became not only quite forgiving to Amy, but sorry for what she herself had done.

"Tell Amy that I am not angry with her now," she said. "I could not have read her letter; but then I'm country. And, Uncle George, I'm so sorry I frightened you."

After this Uncle George went back to London laden with gifts from the repentant Molly for the town children; but, though all the little cousins became very good friends after this misadventure, nobody thought for many years to come of transplanting the wild rose from her country solitude.



"JACK DARING'S CONQUEROR."

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N

"In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the City of Destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction; a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

George Eliot.

CHAPTER 1

"EF it weren't fur Blossom there," said Mrs. Reed, and then she stopped.

She was a young woman, quite young, not much over twenty in years, but in appearance so worn, so spent, so utterly weary with the effort of living that she might have passed for nearer forty.

She was a widow, who took in washing and went out charing, and did those thousand and one things by which the very, very poor manage to keep soul and body together. The motive power of it all, the motive of the constant grinding, the early rising, the unceasing painful toil, the night being often turned into day, was just Blossom. Blossom was a small, thin child of five—the kind of child one often sees in back London streets. She was not at all pretty. How could she be, poor little mite? No fresh air had ever blown on her white

cheeks, and it had been utterly impossible for her mother to give her the nice milk, or good wholesome food, which such babies require. Nevertheless, Blossom, with her tiny yellowwhite hands, her great serious eyes, and her wise, unbaby ways, was the sunshine, the stay, and the joy of poor Mrs. Reed's life.

"Ef it weren't fur Blossom," she said now to the friendly neighbour who had come in and was greedily listening to her tale of woe.

"It is rare and 'ard on yer, Mrs. Reed," replied this woman; "but there's no doubt as a child's a motive—no doubt in h'all the world."

"I've heerd people say," continued Mrs. Reed, "as they'd die fur them as they loves. I mind me as there's a verse in the old Book as says, 'Greater love hath no man, than to lay down his life for his friends.' Seems to me 'tis often harder to live for them nor to die for them."

"Oh, come now," said Mrs. Jones, the neighbour, in a cheery tone, "you're a bit low to-day, and no wonder. 'Tis a real disappointment as that good-fur-nothink brother-in-law of yours should be coming back again. I should have thought as he'd have stopped out of England. He's as great a good-for-nought as ever

breathed. He must ha' been rare an' cunning to get the folks round like that. But, never mind, he have been away so long, it ain't likely as he'll remember the trifle o' money as he lent yer, all this time."

"Yes, he will," said Mrs. Reed, "and he'll have it, too. He's well named Daring, for he is a real bad fellow. Jack ain't likely to have furgot that bit of paper, and it'll ruin me and Blossom, just, it will."

"How is it as yer husband didn't make shift to pay it back while he lived?" said Mrs. Jones.

"He meant to," answered the widow, wiping her eyes, "but he died six months after. He wos tuk quite sudden with the fever, and he wos dead, dead and buried, afore I could well guess as he wor even ill. He had no time to think on Jack and the money. And then it seemed a providence, Jack wor not tuk for that robbery; he'd 'a been locked up fur ten years, sure and certain. I thought the fear o' that 'ud keep him from ever coming back."

"Well, you ain't got the money. Ef you can't pay him, you can't; and there's an end of it."

"But he can sell my bits o' things-my bed

and table, and the mangle. Why, that 'ere mangle is that waluable it 'ud near go to pay him. I wish as I could do without it; but I lives more by that mangle than by any other way. Ef the mangle were gone, Blossom and me 'ud just starve."

"Well, neighbour, it seems to me that ef he is so real cruel and strong, the only thing fur you is jest to give up keeping house fur a bit. You're a likely woman enough, and might get a place as nurse, or maid of all work. You must just go to service, Mrs. Reed, ma'am, and put that 'ere child inter the House for a bit. I don't say fur always, but till you can leastways turn yerself round."

"I'll never, never part from Blossom; we'll stick together, whatever comes," said Mrs. Reed, and she went up to the bed where the little pale child lay fast asleep.

CHAPTER II.

THIS was one of Mrs. Reed's days for going out charing, and soon after the above conversation she went away. As a matter of course, she left little Blossom behind her. There was nothing, to her mind, very hard in this. She was not at all uneasy about her little girl. The trundle bed lay on the floor, and Blossom could tumble in and out without any injury, and she took good care, though the weather was turning rather cold, to let the fire well out in the grate. No-no possible harm could come to little Blossom, and at the time she ought to be hungry Mrs. Jones would come up and give her her dinner. So, fondly kissing the still-sleeping child, she went away.

Mrs. Reed's home was an attic in the roof of what had once been almost a mansion. The court in which it now stood had been a wide street until changes made by railways had made

it too narrow for even a cab to travel along it. The old houses stood along one side of it, and the new brick wall of an immense factory on the other. Each room in the houses was occupied by a separate family, and both outside and in everything save the factory wall looked tumble-down and wretched. Even the living inhabitants were broken-down men, and women too, with faces from which seemed to be stamped out all human love and kindness.

Once, these same men and women were little children, with the beautiful innocent eyes which we never see except on the countenance of a little child. But, partly owing to the influence of the public house round the corner, partly owing to ignorance, greatly owing to example, they had changed to what they were at present, so that all trace of the image of God in which they were created seemed to have left these poor people. But of all the wicked faces that lived in Mercer's court, there were none so bad, none so hardened and depraved, as the face of a very tall and powerful looking man, who entered it about noon the day when this little story begins. His ugly, ill-looking face was closely shaven, and the hair on his head made

The people of the court, him look wild. familiar as they were with bad-looking faces, shrank from him. As he sauntered slowly through the court, so ferocious was his appearance, that the gutter children, accustomed enough to evil sights and sounds, ran away, scuttled round corners, or disappeared into their homes. The man neither noticed them, nor uttered a word to any one; slow as his progress was, he was evidently going through the court with an object. At last he paused at the house where Mrs. Reed lived. He looked up at the windows, gazed into the passage, seemed satisfied, and entered. Children who were playing about in the passages uttered little cries, and disappeared, as the other children had done, at his approach. He called them "dirty brats" under his breath, and slowly mounted the stairs. Half-way up he encountered Mrs. Jones.

"What an ugly man!" exclaimed that good woman, when she caught sight of his face. He did not hear her remark—it would not have mattered in the least to him whether he heard it or not. He stopped her, however, to ask a question.

"Do one George Reed, and Susan, his wife,

live here?" he said. "They did, I know, a while back."

Mrs. Jones knew instantly who the man was who spoke to her. He was poor Susan Reed's enemy—the man who could ruin her—and looked the man who would find pleasure in doing it too. Under such circumstances, Mrs. Jones was tempted to say what was not true.

"There ain't no people of the name in this yere house," she said. She said it hurriedly, passing on as she spoke.

Having no reason to suspect her of an untruth, Jack Daring believed her, and was turning round to go, when a troublesome little child, more courageous than the others, here lifted up its small head and said, in a shrill voice—

"There be a mammy Reed up at the top; she have one little gal!"

Daring smiled, seeing instantly through Mrs. Jones' untruth, and turned to mount the remainder of the stairs.

Mrs. Jones laid her hand on his arm.

"Yer a hard man, I doubt not," she said; "I can guess who you be. No, I ain't ashamed to say as I put yer off wid a lie just now; I know Susan Reed well, and I didn't want her to be

troubled wid sech as you. Yes, I know who you be; you're her husband's half-brother—her husband is dead—dead this many a day; ef I were you I'd leave Susan alone—it don't never prosper wid no man to trouble a widdy!"

For answer, the man roughly shook off the detaining arm, paid not the least heed to the pleading voice, but pursued his way steadily upstairs.

The news of his step-brother's death mattered nothing to him. The bit of paper he had so securely stowed away beneath his dirty shirt-front claimed payment from Susan in lieu of her dead husband. She must give him the three pounds he had lent to him, or he would, could, and should sell all that she had.

The topmost attic of all, where Susan lived, had to be mounted by a ladder. Daring went up slowly, for it was an old ladder, and creaked beneath his weight. The attic door was shut; he lifted the latch and went in.

A poor place, certainly; he was a tall man, and he found he could not stand quite upright in it.

Susan herself was absent; he saw no one in the room. So much the better; he could all

the easier, while quite alone, take a good look round, and consider what Susan had in the way of effects which he could sell for the recovery of his debt. He guessed but too well that she could not possibly pay him in coin, and he determined not to lose any time; he would sell at once, if possible, her poor goods, and so recover what was his own.

His first glance, however, round the room, was not reassuring. That trundle bed on the floor, with the untidy bed-clothes tossed on it, would fetch but a few shillings. Besides the bed, there was a pot and a saucepan, a cracked cup and saucer, a little table and one chair—yes, the furniture was of the very cheapest and poorest kind in the world. Daring knew that, even if successful, he could raise scarcely thirty shillings on so miserable a lot of goods as that. already dark brow darkened yet more as he made this most palpable discovery. The money owing to him was three pounds—three pounds with interest. If ever a man in all the world wanted money, he did. He determined, come what would, to grind it out of the woman.

Suddenly, however, his dark face brightened, he had overlooked one thing—the only thing of real value in the room—the mangle, away in a dark recess under the roof, in the not too bright light in Susan's attic. Daring had overlooked it; now, however, he caught sight of it, and with an exclamation of pleasure stepped forward to examine it. Yes, the mangle was a good one of its kind. When it was sold with the other things, his debt, with the interest, stood a fair chance of being paid. He owned it was a great relief to him, and he sat down on the one chair, and, taking a piece of old newspaper and the stump end of a lead pencil out of his pocket, he began to make a rough inventory of Susan's possessions.

He had nearly completed his task, sitting with his back to the tiny attic window, when he was conscious of a very soft touch. The touch in the room where he fancied himself to be all alone, startled even his iron nerves. He looked round hastily. A child, without a scrap of fear in its face, was gazing up at him.

"Little Blossom so lonely," it said, and it came close, and laid a small yellow hand on his knee.

Down dropped paper and rough inventory, and Daring's fierce eyes gazed in astonishment

at the child. The child returned his gaze, and its little thin face broke out into smiles and dimples.

"Blossom lonely," it said again.

"Be you Susan Reed's young 'un?" asked Daring, when he could find his tongue.

"My mammie live yere. Blossom live yere. Blossom so lonely."

The little hands were now beating up and down on the man's trousers, and the eyes, in delight at this unexpected companionship, actually seemed to laugh.

Daring began muttering to himself—he rose to his feet.

"Yer mother should not leave yer," he said; and then, moved by some unknown impulse, he stooped and took the child in his arms.

There was a tiny little square of looking-glass hanging up on the wall, and the man's face and the child's were reflected in it. The child suddenly put her arms round the man's neck and kissed him. He let her slip from his arms as though he were shot, fumbled in his pocket, found a halfpenny, put it into her hand and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER III.

HALF-WAY down the stairs Daring and Susan met. It was many years since they had last seen each other, and changes had come over the faces of both. Susan had been little more than a child when Daring had last spoken to her, and Daring himself had looked a trifle less ugly when his bad face had been partly concealed by his beard; but neither could for a moment mistake the other, and meeting thus on the narrow stairs they both stopped.

In her heart poor Susan might have said, "Hast thou found me, oh! mine enemy?" Instead, however, she put forth a timid hand and said in a faltering voice, "So yer back again, Jack?"

Jack Daring laughed, not pleasantly.

"I didn't come fur a welcome," he said; "I neither come fur one, nor looked fur one. I jest looked in to ax fur my money."

"George is dead," answered Susan, raising her pretty, pathetic eyes to the hard man's face as she spoke.

"Ay, ay, like enough," replied Daring; "George was always a sickly lot. I never thought or expected as he'd be long-lived. But that makes no difference in the trifle o' money."

"Oh! Jack, I'll pay yer as soon as ever I can. I ha' a little child; and I'm but sickly, and a poor widow. Give me a bit o' time, Jack, and I'll pinch and starve, and you shall have the money—you shall indeed."

"I have been up in the room yonder, and I saw yer belongings. They're, I will say, a poor lot. But there's the mangle. It is lucky as you have that mangle, Susan, fur it will go far to clear off the debt."

"You'll sell the mangle!" said Susan. She did not mind the other things—but the mangle—that represented her living, that put bread into her little child's mouth, that paid the rent; with the help of the mangle she could live; without it she and her darling must starve. With a bitter cry, the poor young woman went down on her knees. "Don't sell the mangle,

Jack. Fur ef you do, me and Blossom must starve."

"Starve then," said the man savagely, and he pushed her away. "I'm goin' to sell it."

He heard a wailing cry from the brokenhearted creature, but he took no notice. He went rapidly through the court.

Again the children fled to right and left at his approach. He noticed it this time, and said to himself, "The little 'un upstairs weren't a bit afeard of me."

He had forgotten all about Blossom when talking to her mother. But now, when the court children fled in terror, he remembered her.

"She wor a real pert little 'un," he said, and he smiled grimly.

He raised his hand to feel where her soft lips had pressed his cheek, then, ashamed at being touched, or interested in any way by such a trifle, hurried off to the nearest public-house.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was late that night when Daring turned out of the public-house into the street. still a few shillings in his pocket, and, after bidding his companions a careless good-night, he repaired to the rough lodging where he had slept the night before. He had made inquiries as to how to get hold of Susan's things, and had been told that the lawful process would take at least three weeks, and he was very much annoyed at the thought of having to wait so long for his money. It came into his evil head to take the goods from Susan Reed by force or fraud, for he felt quite sure that she was both too poor and too ignorant to attempt to go to law with him. Satisfied with this idea, he resolved to put these means in force at an early hour the next day; and, well pleased with his evening and himself, he dropped asleep.

His brain was rather in a confused state, and after a few hours of heavy slumber he began to dream. He dreamed the strangest dream in all the world for such a man as he. He dreamed that he was loved by, and that he loved, a little child. He had no idea in his dream who the child was, but he had a queer, soft, happy sensation in his heart towards it, and the child clung to him.

When he awoke he remembered the little scene with Blossom the day before. He felt again her little hand beating on his knee—her eyes smiling up at him, her strange, old-fashioned, and yet most baby face filled with satisfaction as she felt him near her.

"A smart young 'un; a werry, werry smart young 'un," he muttered to himself. But he could sleep no longer; he rose, dressed himself, and, early morning, almost night as it was, sauntered out. Presently, without any distinct thought in the matter, he found himself in the neighbourhood of Mercer's Court. He entered the court.

This was the hour when, even in London, all the world was still. He went on, expecting to find the court empty; instead, he saw a very bright light, and a crowd of screaming, excited people. A glance revealed to him the state of the case. One of the handsome houses of the street was on fire. He drew a little nearer, then a sudden, sharp cry broke from his lips, for the burning house was just in front of that in which Susan Reed lived—the house where his furniture, and the mangle which he already considered his own, were. Already the flames had passed from the front street to the court. His possessions might be burning to ashes. He gave no thought, as yet, to the human lives in such deadly peril.

Crowds from neighbouring streets were pouring in, and by the time two fire-escapes had arrived the wide street and little court were full. But with the escapes came policemen, and, in consequence, some semblance of order was restored. The fire-escapes were quickly run up to the windows of the burning houses, but they could not be got into Mercer's Court. A common ladder was all that could go there, and some strong men climbed it and searched the rooms where were sleepers heavy in weary sleep and stifled with smoke. One of the last to be rescued was poor Susan Reed, who was

brought to the ground in a state of complete insensibility. The men then fancied that every soul was out of the house, and the ladder was removed, and the hose from the engine in the street began to play upon the house. There was no hope whatever of saving it, but the fire might be prevented spreading, and Daring, interested in spite of himself, drew near to watch the process.

Suddenly, above the roar of the flames, the excited voice of the multitude, and the play of the engines, came a sound so shrill, so brief, so awful, that even Daring's callous heart stood still. It was a woman's broken-hearted cry—a woman whose child had been left in the burning house.

"Blossom, Blossom!" rang out on the night air, and Susan Reed, half mad with anguish and terror, tried to force her way back into the flames. She was held forcibly back, and men once more ran with the ladder and endeavoured, as all brave men would, to reach the little child. Their attempts, however, appeared useless. The child was at the very top of the house which might be expected to fall in each moment. Again and again the men went up, and again and again were baffled by the devouring flames.

"Poor young 'un, she must be dead by this time—dead, suffocated," said a man to Daring.

This man had children of his own, and the tears were rolling down his cheeks as he spoke.

At the words Jack Daring started, shook himself, and replied in a loud, fierce voice, "Dead or alive, I'll bring her down."

In an instant the strong man sprung up the ladder. So sudden was his movement that no one had time to prevent that leaping figure flying on to what seemed instant destruction. He had no idea what impulse had come over him, only as he seemed to rush into the flames he felt in a sudden glow of great exultation which filled his heart, that he understood the meaning of his dream—that he, the convict, the thief, the hardened wretch, without one redeeming trait, loved a little child even unto death.

In vain the crowds below shouted to him not to rush on his destruction. He heeded no voice but the great glad voice from his better nature. He entered the room, which seemed literally enveloped in flames; he found the child fallen down and insensible near the door; he wrapped her in his arms and bore her out—she unhurt, but his hair singed, and his hands burned nearly to the bone. He carried her tenderly down the ladder and placed her in her mother's arms. Then, strong man that he was, so terrible were the sufferings caused by his own extensive burns that he fainted away.

Blossom was unhurt, rescued just before one breath of the fire had actually reached her; but Daring for many, many days lay in the hospital at the point of death. When he at last recovered consciousness, it was to see a woman and a child watching by his bedside. The woman was weeping and blessing him; the child regarded him with grave eyes.

"Be that 'ere little Blossom?" he asked, feebly.

"Yes, yes, Jack Daring," sobbed Susan, falling on her knees as she spoke. "Tis my little Blossom that you saved. You saved her life. God Almighty bless yer fur the bravest man as ever lived."

"Me, the bravest man?" said Daring; but then, as the mystery became clear to him, he smiled through a tear and said faintly (for all his former great strength had gone out of him), "It wor nothink wot I did, fur I loved the little thing."

Yes, that was the secret of it all—the mighty power of love, it made a new man of Jack Daring.

Weeks afterwards he left the hospital, maimed in body, and with the sight of one eye gone. But in spirit, how altered was he! All his future life he was good to Susan Reed, but he loved his little conqueror.

Once, and once only, he alluded to the debt which Susan still considered that she owed him.

"I didn't know it at the time," he said, "but little Blossom there paid the debt when she kissed me."

"LITTLE BLACK SHEEP."

"Joy for the promise of our loftier homes!

Joy for the promise of another birth!

For oft oppressive unto pain becomes

The riddle of the earth."

CHAPTER I.

SUCH a little room! so dusty, so hot! Let me try to describe it. In one corner was a bed—a bed which was not made up, but was dirty and musty, and spread, not on any comfortable. mattress, but on the floor. Opposite the bed was a cracked looking-glass-a glass so all over cracks and irregularities that little Tom, who lay in the bed, never dared look in it; it made him appear so crooked. There was a small grate, but no fire in it; that was rather a comfort, as the day was so hot. Near the empty grate was a three-legged stool, and I think that was all the furniture in the room, if I except a cup and saucer and plate, which were placed for safety on a high shelf against the wall. That was the furniture, and the occupant was Tom-Tom who lay in the dirty, musty bed.

He was a very little boy, with a small, thin,

discontented face. It was scarely to be wondered that he was discontented, for he was ill. was so ill that he could not leave the comfortless room, or the still more comfortless bed. He was ill, and he was alone; he had no storybooks to read, and no nice food, and no kind playmates to come in and amuse him; and, saddest of all, his mother, who would have done her best for him and never forsaken him, was dead, and his father was not the sort of man to trouble his head as to how Tom passed his Tom had been an invalid and sickly since his birth, but no one had ever gone to the trouble to try to get him admitted to a children's hospital; so no kind doctors nurses had ever tried to make him better. was accustomed to being ill now, and supposed that he should be so always.

He was not a pleasant little sick boy; the sufferings he had undergone had neither improved his temper nor elevated his mind. With other children he was very fractious, very disagreeable. Some sick children are forbearing and gentle with their fellows, but Tom was not one of these. Consequently the boys and girls in the London alley where he lived avoided him.

Finding that he had no sympathy with their games, their quarrels, their loves, they never came near him. There was no child in all the alley to feel pity for Tom. They were selfish, as all utterly untaught, ignorant children generally are, and they left poor, sick, sad Tom to his fate. He used to hear them down below in the court; he used to hear their ringing laughter and merry words, and as he listened to the mirth in which he could not join he grew more and more bitter in his poor little mind. This bitterness of heart grew into the expression of his face, it formed lines round his thin lips. and took the childishness from his eyes; he was fast becoming one of those saddest of all God's creatures—a child without a child's heart.

Tom's father was one of those wretched men who think nothing of the Divine relationship which binds them to their child. Provided the child had food and shelter after a certain fashion, he considered his duty done towards him. As to the mind of his child, he never gave it a thought. He had never, indeed, given a thought to his own mind, and now it was almost gone, swallowed up by the love of drink, and the love of all other forms of evil.

Tom was rather afraid of his father; but when the father swore in his presence, he stored up the wicked words in his heart, to use them himself by-and-by. Thus he was growing worse both in body and in mind. He was being educated, it was true—for living is alone an education—but just then it was altogether the devil's education.

The change for little Tom, the turning-point—in short, the stretching out of the loving hand of Christ to draw him into the fold—came about in a singular manner.

One day, in the middle of the hot month of August, he was stretched on his dirty bed, and was feeling in all respects his worst. He had gone through a bad night—a night in which, without exactly suffering pain, he could scarcely sleep. He had awakened in the morning from what uncomfortable slumber he could obtain, in a thoroughly crooked state of mind—there is no other word to express the true state of the poor little fellow's feelings. In this state he was more than usually fractious to the neighbour who came up every morning from a room downstairs to attend to him. She was not a very nice woman, but she would have been fairly

kind to Tom if he would have let her. He was, however, as I have said, by no means a pleasant child, and the fact of his being sick could not alone enlist her sympathies. To-day he was very cross; he refused to touch the breakfast she had provided for him, and when, an hour later, she sent it up again by her daughter and the youngest baby, he made faces at the little messenger and pinched the baby until he The woman downstairs would have roared. nothing more to say to Tom that day after this, and now he was left all alone, feeling very cross, very miserable, and by this time very hungry.

He could hear the boys and girls playing and quarrelling in the court below. How he did long to join them—how hard seemed his fate! At last, tired from his bad night and uncomfortable morning, he dropped asleep. He awoke after an hour or so, somewhat refreshed, to hear steps pausing at his door—hurried, light, child steps. Tom felt his heart beat; he was tired of being alone; he hoped they would not go away. They did not; they paused outside the door. Presently the door was pushed a tiny bit open, then a little hand was seen, then a small

naked foot; foot and hand were quickly followed by a rough head and small, dirty face, and the next moment a little girl of about Tom's age entered the room. She was a very ragged child indeed; even Tom felt that he was gazing at a worse specimen of the race than he had ever seen before. She was dressed in what looked like a bag made of carpet; there was a hole for the neck, and two holes for the sleeves. The little girl's arms were quite naked, and so were her legs from the knees down. Her head was all over short black hair, which stood upright; her eyes were very dark and bright.

"Well, you're a smart 'un, you ere!" said Tom, surveying her with much contempt.

The little girl came and stood on one leg in front of him, and grinned.

"You don't live in this 'ere court, I guess," continued Tom. "We're a step above you, h'anyhow, I guess."

"I wouldn't guess, ef I wor you," said the girl, still grinning. "Them as guesses is often wrong. Now I guesses a deal about you."

"Wot-wot?" said Tom, who was intensely curious.

"I'll tell yer when I have slep a bit. That

'ere bed looks nice. Kick yer feet a one side, and I'll take a nap."

Before Tom could indignantly forbid himself to be pushed about, the little girl had flung herself on the foot of the dirty bed, had curled herself up like a ball, and was fast asleep. In vain Tom kicked at her, shouted to her, abused her; she snored loudly, and slept all the sounder. In very despair he was forced at last to let her lie; but his thoughts towards her were not pleasant. She woke just as suddenly as she had dropped asleep, sat up, grinned at Tom, and resumed where she had left off.

"Now I'll tell yer wot I guesses 'bout yer."

"Tell away," answered Tom.

"Yer a real plaguy young 'un. I guess as no one don't love yer much."

"I'll kick yer," said Tom, with his face crimson.

"Yer can't; ain't yer sick and lame? Ha, ha! Oh! wot's that?" Suddenly all the spirit seemed to die out of the child; her face grew white. "Oh, that's her! Oh, hide me!" she said. In an instant she had made herself perfectly flat, and Tom had thrown part of his counterpane over her.

He had scarcely done so before a tall, powerfully-built woman, with a red face and eyes bloodshot from drink, entered the room.

"Have yer seen my young 'un?" she said to Tom.

"I don't know yer young 'un," answered Tom, in a demure tone, which he could scarcely recognise as his own.

The woman glanced round the room, perceived nothing to arouse her suspicions, and turned away.

"She'll cotch it—oh, won't she cotch it fur this!" she said, as she went downstairs.

CHAPTER II.

As soon as the woman was well out of sight, and all sound of her footsteps had died away, the little girl cautiously raised her head and looked at Tom. She gazed full in his face for a minute, then, sudden as all her movements were, made a dart at him and kissed him.

"Yer a softy after all, and I like yer," she said.

Tom did not admire being kissed, but he was so tired of doing nothing, and besides so curious to know something of so queer a child, that he condescended to allow her to talk to him, and even to ask her questions himself.

"Well, I'm safe fur a spell now," she said, curling herself up with her legs under her on Tom's bed. "She'll look fur me yere, there, and h'everywhere, but she won't come anigh this yere room again."

"Does she beat yer h'awful?" asked Tom, with a keen relish in his tone for horrors which he hoped would be related.

"Oh! don't she, jest? She's a triffic woman when she's up is mother. She'd wollop yer, when she's in drink, until yer fit to die. I've screamed out to die heaps o' times, but it warn't no use. Them as is comfirble in the world dies, them as is misribble stays. That's as I find things is done. Ain't it a crooked place, this yere world?" concluded the small gipsy girl, with the air of a philosopher.

"I finds it so," answered Tom, with an appreciative sigh. "But I thought," he continued, "as mothers worn't as bad as all that. I ain't got no mother; I wishes as I had. But them young 'uns as has mothers ain't treated as rough as all that."

"Them young 'uns has own mothers maybe," answered the girl. "I've oft heard as own mothers worn't sech a bad lot, but mine ain't an own mother—she's a step-o'-stairs mother."

Her experience of second mothers was small and especially unfortunate. She could scarcely have fared better at the hands of an own mother who was constantly drunk.

- "But yours ain't a sober mother; it's drink as does it," answered Tom.
- "No, she ain't. Wot's yer name, boy?" she continued.
 - "Tom. Wot's yours?"
- "Dun-no; they calls me Spitfire. I've a' deal of sperret, they says. Why not? 'tis the only pleasure in life, a-plaguing of 'em."

Tom laughed.

- "Well, yer a werry queer young'un," he said, but he pronounced the words rather as if he was bestowing a compliment.
- "Yes, ain't I? but fur all that I ain't so queer as you. I don't lie a-bed all day, for instance."
- "Don't yer know as I can't walk?" said Tom.
 "I don't want no one to pity me. I don't want to walk, not the least bit in life; but I can't, so ye'd better not twit me wi' lyin' in bed, Spitfire."

"I won't," said Spitfire, in a solemn tone. Her round, comical face had grown quite long as she gazed at Tom and tried to receive the idea that he was really unable to leave his bed. "And yer haven't a mother?" she said, suddenly.

[&]quot;No!"

[&]quot;Nor a father neither?"

"Oh, yes; but he ain't o' much use to me; he's out most times, and when he's in he's tipsy."

"Oh!" said Spitfire, "ain't yer just like me? But he doesn't thrash you, does he?" and, not waiting an answer, "but I ain't lame; I can run away. No, thank my stars, I can use my legs all right and tidy. I wouldn't be you for a deal, Tom—no, not fur nothin'; and I does pity ye, whether ye likes it or not."

"Well then, don't," said Tom. "Ef there's one sort more'n another I 'ates, 'tis the pitying sort—them as looks at a chap, and says, 'My! ain't he lame? My! I wouldn't be him fur a deal.' Don't be that sort, Spitfire."

CHAPTER III.

In the desert of Tom's neglected little heart there was one green spot; that spot was the memory of his dead mother. He was very glad, when Spitfire went away and he was once alone, to think that the woman who was so unkind to Spitfire and treated her so "dreffle" was only a "step-o'-stairs" mother. Hard as he was, it would have pained him to think that own mothers could be so cruel. Had Spitfire told him that she received such conduct from the hands of her own mother, the last remnant of faith left in him would have died away; but this was not so, and his faith still remained. The faith in his dead mother, and, because of her, in all mothers, was the only bit of piety in the heart of little Tom.

She had been dead now for three years, but he remembered her just as vividly as though she had only left him yesterday. He was a

stoical little fellow, and no one ever guessed how, when the pain troubled him, he longed to lay his head on her breast, and to look up into her kind, worn face. She was a brokendown, poor woman-broken down by hardship, neglect, even cruelty, for her drunken husband had no regard for her. She was the kind of woman whom the neighbours thought nothing at all about; they considered her poor-spirited, and so she was; but she passionately loved Tom, and Tom knew, when she was dead, that he passionately loved her. During her life-time he had not given her a special thought; she was his mother, the person who was good to him, and saw to his comforts. He was cross enough to her in the days when she was with him from morning to night, but when she was gone, when, listen as he would, he could never hear her footfall or see her face, then he missed her, missed her sorely.

"I'm glad as that dreffle woman ain't her mother," he said to himself, thinking of Spitfire.

The two children had sat and chatted together till nearly dusk, then the girl, like the little savage that she was, darted away, making no promise of return. She had given Tom, however, plenty to think about, and he was less lonely and less miserable than usual that night.

The next morning the memory of Spitfire came with his first waking moments. He hoped she would come to see him again that day. She was an interest in his little life, and he was in consequence quite amiable to Mrs. Dod, the woman who attended him, when she came up to give him his breakfast and make his room tidy that day.

He was generally the most snappy, cross, disagreeable little patient, but to-day he was quite quiet when she dressed his bad leg and put his bed tidy. This conduct astonished Mrs. Dod so much that she said downstairs afterwards, "She hoped as Tom wor not goin' to be took *real* bad, for he had turned all on a suddent quite angelic."

When she went away, Tom ate his breakfast and looked up almost contentedly at the hot sky through the attic window. Soon now Spit-fire might be expected to arrive; he would be very glad indeed to see her, but of course he was not going to say so; that would, he considered, be making himself very cheap. No,

he would let Spitfire look upon his room as a refuge—as a sort of place which she was very lucky to get admittance to—then she would be glad to come, and he should see her often.

He had to wait, however, a long time, until quite the afternoon; then, indeed, the child's light step was heard, and the wild little thing, in her strange carpet dress, darted into the room and, making three somersaults, came up to Tom's bed.

"Well, ef I ain't been a-dying ever since!" she exclaimed. "I crep in late last night when mother wor asleep, and out I goes first light this morn. Oh! ain't she jest mad, fur she wanted me to hold the babby, when she wor a-charin.' I heerd her a-screeching fur me all the morning. Ain't I lucky that she 'aven't cotched me!"

"But, Spitfire," said Tom, "ain't yer had nothink to eat?"

"Yes; I had an apple—I took it from old Truncoat's stall, when he worn't a lookin'. I'd an apple, and I picked up a crust as some 'un had throwed away."

Now Tom's mother was an honest woman, and she had instilled into Tom's mind a con-

tempt for stealing; so now he said, in a tone of virtuous indignation—

"Well, ef ye ain't mean! why, that 'ere's thievin', that is."

"Dun-no nothink 'bout that," said Spitfire.
"I wor hungry, and I tuk it; I took two, and I've kep' one fur you, Tom—so there!"

Tom dearly loved apples, and when Spitfire held out a bright golden American one to him, he felt his lips water; still, his mother had called it wrong to steal, and this beautiful apple was stolen.

"No!" he said, shaking his head, "I wouldn't eat that 'ere apple of ye were to tear me in bits."

"H'all right," said Spitfire, making her own white teeth meet in the juicy fruit. Tom really longed for the apple, and felt very cross as he watched her.

"The perleece could take ye up of they saw ye," he said.

"The perleece won't see me," laughed the girl. "Bless ye, Tom! how's I to live without cotching buns and apples, and sech-like, off stalls? I'd 'ave been dead long enough back, but fur that."

"'Tis wicked all the same," said Tom, who felt himself quite civilized beside this little heathen.

Spitfire finished her apple in serene silence the fact of being wicked meant little or nothing to her, so did not trouble her. When she had consumed the last mouthful, she folded her hands and looked straight at Tom.

"Tom," she said, "wot 'appens to folks arter they're dead?"

"Don't," said Tom. He was too ill to care for such gloomy subjects.

Spitfire, however, in radiant health and strength, felt a philosophical interest in the question. "Wot 'appens to them?" she continued. "I once heerd a street preacher say as they wor sperrits bright. Wot's sperrits bright, Tom?"

"Dun-no," said Tom; "but I guess as mother's one. Ef ye ever 'ad an own mother, Spitfire, I s'pose as she's a sperrit bright."

"I don't think I ever 'ad an own mother," said Spitfire. "I don't recollec' her; but I once seed a woman a-lying dead. She looked no way bright—she wor straight, and cold, and still. I guess as 'twas a lie the street preacher

told; he said it to sound pretty. 'Sperrits bright' sounds real pretty, but 'twas jest a lie; most things as is pretty is."

Tom, however, had dim memories to assist him, and he shook his head.

"I don't quite think as 'tis all a lie, Spitfire," he said. "I've heard someot like it afore. I don't think as 'tis quite all a lie."

Spitfire gazed at him hard. "Yer werry sick, ain't ye?" she said.

"I've a bad leg, and I can't walk," answered Tom, shortly.

"Well, ye looks dreffle bad—yaller as a guinea, and pinched, and ugly. I guess as ye'll soon die, Tom."

"How dare ye?" said Tom, raising his hand to strike her.

"Why, ye ain't afeared? I wouldn't be one bit afeared to die."

"Yes, ye would, ef ye wor lying sick like me."

"No, I wouldn't. I'd like it real well. I'd like to be a sperrit bright. It sounds so pretty. Tom, wot I'm a-thinking is, as yer like to die soon, ef ye finds as yer a sperrit bright, yer might come back and tell me, and ef I dies first,

I'll come and tell you. I ain't likely to, but we'll make agreement either way."

Before Tom could find words to reply to this suggestion, steps, which they had neither of them noticed coming up the stairs, entered the room, and poor Spitfire's step-mother caught her by the shoulder.

"You baggage!" she said, "ef ye won't cotch it fur this!"

And, taking her arm, she dragged her from the room. Before Spitfire could disappear, however, she managed to roll up her eyes until only the whites were seen, and she sang out to Tom, "Don't furget our 'greement; and I wouldn't be a bit afeared, ef I wor you."

CHAPTER IV.

THE next day Tom looked out more anxiously than ever for Spitfire; they had made a kind of compact together, and he was very anxious to speak to her about it. He did not much like the compact; he did not consider his side of it at all fair. He was to die first, and then come back and tell Spitfire about "spirits bright." He did not want to die first. He did not want to die at all, and he thought Spitfire's idea about him both disagreeable and unkind. It would be very well, certainly, to learn something distinct and definite about the future, which lay so dark and vague before their little minds; but he did not wish to be the one to go into the dreary unknown and fetch the tidings. Spitfire had certainly promised to come and tell him, but she did not seem to suppose that she could die first. Why was she so certain that he was the one to go away?

As well as he could make out, he was the younger by a year or so. Then of course he had a year longer to live. What a disagreeable little girl she was to be so certain about his death.

To-morrow he would speak to her about it, and show the ignorant little creature that she was the one who would have to go, and bring back the certainty to him.

As Tom came to this resolve, he raised his head and saw his own reflection in the glass opposite. The glass, as I said, had a crack right down the centre, and a very contorted little visage did it now present to Tom. As he looked at himself, he remembered Spitfire's "Ye looks dreffle bad, Tom."

Yes! there was no doubt he did look bad. He looked worse even than any of the other children he saw. Spitfire, though older, had not his appearance. Her lips were red, whereas his were pale; her eyes were clear and bright, whereas his—he could see by the crooked glass—were, oh! so sunken. Yes; perhaps people who looked like him did die first. He did not like the thought, and even some tears rolled down his thin cheeks as the certainty of the

truth of it forced itself on his convictions. Well, the next time he saw Spitfire he would question her more closely on the subject.

But the next day passed, and the next, and the next, without the little girl making her appearance.

Tom grew very weary of waiting for her.

CHAPTER V.

Tom was to wait a long time, and grow much more weary, before Spitfire came back to him His interest, however, was unexpectedly aroused in another direction, and he thought less about her non-appearance than he would otherwise have done. He had waited for her for nearly a week, and had grown more weary than he had every done in his life of his dull bed and hot room, when the other interest came to him.

This was the interest. One day his father brought home a new wife. It was the hottest day of all the hot summer, and Tom had dropped asleep. When he awoke, his father and a round-eyed, cherry-cheeked young woman were standing by his side. His father was laughing; the young woman looked interested and kind.

"There's the 'cumbrance, Molly," said Tom's father, pointing at him. "There's the 'cum-

brance as I couldn't get rid of; you must make the best of it, lass."

Then he turned on his heel and walked out of the room, and Tom and the young woman were left alone. Tom raised himself on his elbow, and spoke in his rudest tones,—

"Get out o' that," he said; "I don't want ye."

"I'm yer mother, Tom, dear," said the young woman.

"My what?" said Tom.

"I'm yer mother; yer father and I wor married this here blessed morning."

Tom's little face grew crimson.

"Oh! oh!" he said, beginning to sob loudly; "so yer a step-o'-stairs mother. Oh! oh! oh! ain't I as bad off as Spitfire now?"

He turned his face to the wall, and refused to be comforted.

The young woman went and sat down by the fire. There was some dismay, but also much kindness, in her round bright eyes. After a time she took off her wedding bonnet and shawl, pinned up her neat cotton dress, and began to mend the fire. Tom heard her making a noise, and turned softly to watch her. She raked out

all the ashes, built a new and neat fire, and set the kettle on to boil. Then, seeing that Tom's face was now towards her, she said in a cheerful voice—

"Now, Tom, you and me'll enjoy our cup o' tea."

"But there ain't no tea," said Tom, with quite a sardonic smile on his queer little face; "there ain't nought to make ye comfortable in this 'ere house."

"We'll see," said the young woman; and smiling, but very good-naturedly, she hastily tied on her bonnet and ran downstairs.

She was absent about ten minutes, and when she returned with a small basket on her arm, the kettle had just begun to boil. She opened her basket, and produced tea and sugar, a small loaf, a pat of butter, and, what fairly made Tom's eyes dance in his head, a little cake frosted all over.

In a short time they were enjoying together the nicest tea Tom had ever tasted. He could not be very cross while he was eating, but he had by no means opened his heart to receive his step-mother as yet.

"Whatever did ye go and marry father

for?" he said, as he swallowed his last morsel of cake; "and what part of t' town do ye hail from?"

The young woman replied to the last part of Tom's question.

"Well, dear, I come from a part called Golden Lane."

"Golden Lane. Oh! ain't that a lucky part! Wouldn't Spitfire like to hear o' that part! I spose yer rare and rich there. Gold! that's wot I should like, ain't it?"

"Yes, yes, my dear. But there ain't much o' that kind o' gold to be found in Golden Lane, though the place have changed, and is changing more, since the good man as works there have brought the news o' the Gospel Gold—but there! I must set the place tidy for father, and then I'll talk to ye."

Somehow Tom had never found any afternoon of his life since his own mother died go so quickly. The time passed quickly, though he was so smothered with dust that he could hardly breathe; for there was, oh! so very much dirt to sweep away. But the bride seemed to enjoy this certainly novel way of spending her honeymoon. She washed, and scrubbed, and dusted; and out of a box which a man brought for her, produced a clean counterpane to spread over Tom's bed. Tom himself she did not touch, though she nodded to him in a way which made him feel that his time was coming. Then at last she washed herself, once more straightened her bridal dress, and sat down. She had scarcely done so, before the door was opened, and Spitfire's step-mother entered the room. Tom managed to suppress a scream of surprise as he saw her. The woman did not even look at him.

"Well, Molly," she said, addressing the bride, "ef ye havn't undertook a nice handful. I feels fur ye, lass, that I do."

"Don't go on then, pray, Hannah," said the young woman, "fur I don't pity myself one bit. I'm as contented as possible."

"Oh, wait a while; we're all like that at first. Wait a while. Ain't ye got a sick child and drunken husband?"

The cherry cheeks of Tom's step-o'-stairs mother became positively crimson.

"Don't, Hannah," she said; "ye have no call to say them 'ere words; the child may be a positive blessing, and as fur my mate, ain't he took the pledge? No one shall call him drunken to me."

The woman laughed, and was turning away, but Tom suddenly in a voice of entreaty called her back.

"Please, please," he said, "where's Spitfire? Let her come to see me."

The woman laughed again long and loudly.

"Why is it Spitsire?" she said. "Oh! ain't she jest a handful? I spose as she's to be called one o' my blessings. Oh! but don't I hate her jest! No, Tom, or wot-h'ever's yer name, ye can't see no more of Spitsire. She've run away, Spitsire 'ave, a fortnight ago. The werry night as I cotched her wi' you I wollopped her a bit, as I said I would, and she jest went white wi' passion and run out o' the house, and she've never come back since. She wor rare and spiteful, for I didn't hurt her, nothing to tell on. But she wor a bad 'un; she've run away. She may be dead for aught as I knows."

Then the woman went downstairs, and Tom and his step-mother were left alone.

CHAPTER VI.

AGAIN Tom turned his face to the wall, and his step-mother could get nothing out of him. a tone full of interest and sympathy, she asked who Spitfire was, but Tom would not answer. She tried the effect of other topics of conversation, but neither would he respond to them. At last she was fain to let him alone; and presently Tom's father returned, and he and his bride went out together, and Tom found himself once more the solitary inmate of the attic. Then when he was quite sure that their footsteps had died away, a little noise did come from the poor trundle-bed. The little thin form of the sick boy began to heave up and down under the bed-clothes, and great sobs to come from his throat. He had made a discovery, and he found that he could keep it to himself no longer; he must find vent for it in those sobs and that heaving of his poor little frame.

He had managed to subdue all outward emotion while his step-mother was present, but now the emotion with which his heart was full must have its way. This was the discovery that had come to him. He found out that he loved Spitfire-that her little heart fitted somehow very closely to his own, and that his heart was now aching badly at the thought of not seeing her again. He was very much puzzled at himself. He could not understand how such a thing had come about. He had begun by rather despising the poor little thing; but her talk, her actions, her ways had fascinated him in spite of himself. There were points of similarity between them. They were both regarded somehow as black sheep in their No one seemed to love respective homes. either of them. It must end in the forlorn little pair loving one another.

Tom knew now why he had felt so impatient to see Spitfire again. It was not only to hear about "spirits bright;" it was just, also, because she was Spitfire—the little wild thing with the black eyes and funny face and queer ways, who had got into the heart of the boy nearly as wild and queer as herself. She had

said to him, "Well, I does pity ye, whether ye likes it or no." And Tom found he did not mind being pitied by her. But now she was dead! Her dreadful step-mother had not seen her for a fortnight. She had run away, probably, after a very cruel beating; and now she must be dead. Even Spitfire could not live for a whole fortnight without regular food and a regular home. Of course she was dead. Even her step-mother admitted that.

Yes, Spitfire was dead; and she had also broken her compact—she had not come back to tell him about "spirits bright." Tom felt quite sure that Spitfire, even in the other world, would not forget such a solemn compact as she herself had arranged between them.

There was only one solution to this state of things for Tom. Spitfire had not come back because there was nothing to tell. There were no "spirits bright." That story of the street preachers was only a story—a pretty story likely to attract the attention of miserable children like Tom and Spitfire, but with no truth in it whatever. Tom was sorely distressed. He would have liked to comfort himself with all that those two words imply. They

had entered into his mind and fascinated him. In addition to the loss of Spitfire, he must now also give up the hope that had been, he scarcely knew how or why, shedding a little light across his path. But of course they were dead words with no meaning whatever, now that Spitfire had not come back.

"Tom," said his step-mother on the Sunday following her wedding.

Tom had been asleep, and had now awakened, and was looking out of the attic window, which was almost over his bed. Out and up looked Tom; right up to the sky, which was the only part of God's creation to be seen from his window. Very sad did Tom feel, and his sunken eyes suddenly filled with tears. His step-mother saw the tears, and they pained a heart full of lovingkindness. She had failed hitherto to understand Tom; but she saw that something was troubling him, and, coming nearer his bedside, she tried to divert his thoughts.

"Tom," she said, "you axed me a question the day as I wor married, and I 'ad no time to answer it. Shall I answer it now?"

"I dun-no wot I axed," said Tom, wearily.

"Well, Tom, dear, it wor this: I telled ye as I lived in Golden Lane afore I married yer father, and ye said as that place must be full o' gold. I said it wor full o' gospel gold. You didn't rightly know what I meant by that 'ere, did ye, Tom?"

"No; and I don't want to hear now," said Tom. "I'm sure I don't want to hear nothink about it."

"That's a pity," answered little Mrs. Milne; "that's a rare pity, fur 'tis so pretty. Pretty! why, it's jest beautiful! No one in their senses 'ud compare the biggest heap o' gold in the world to gospel gold."

"Ef it's as pretty as all that," said Tom, "it's not true. Nothink is pretty as is true. I don't want to hear it the least in life."

"But it's as true as it's pretty, Tom, my dear. How shall I tell ye how true it is? 'Tis as true as that you and me is setting ere together, and that I'm married to yer father, and that I wants to be real, own mother to ye, ef ye'll let me, Tom."

"Don't," said Tom, passionately; "I 'ad an own mother once." Then he added, after a moment's pause, in which he was winking the tears away, and trying to make believe he was not crying, "Ef it's as true as h'all that, ye may tell me a bit, ef ye wishes to."

"'Tis beautiful," said Mrs. Milne; "we'll call it 'The Story o' Gospel Gold.'" And, seating herself so that Tom could see her, she began. As she spoke, her bright face began to shine. She was telling the story of her own heart. She described Golden Lane as it was and as it is. She told why the change was wrought. At first Tom listened indifferently; then with interest; then eagerly; then again his face grew doubtful, a frown came on his forehead, his thin lips twitched.

"Stop," he said, suddenly; "'ave that ere story anythink to say to sperrits bright?"

Mrs. Milne looked astonished.

"Why, Tom," she said, "ye must 'ave heerd it afore. Of course, it have everythink to say to spirits bright. When we, who get that beautiful gospel gold into our hearts down here—when we die, Tom, we become spirits bright."

"I guessed so," said Tom, with the passion of a whole agony of unbelief in his voice. "I guessed as it wor all too pretty to be true.

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Ain't it a shame to tell me sech lies? There ain't no sperrits bright, nor nothink. Don't say another word, fur I won't listen." And he put up his fingers to his ears to stop them.

CHAPTER VII.

Tom was certainly lucky in his step-mother. She was as different from Spitfire's step-mother -indeed, she was as different from all the other women in the court as all that is good can be from all that is evil. She had undertaken no light task when in her own youth and strength she resolved to work the reform of Tom's father, of Tom's home, and last, but not least, of Tom himself. With the two former objects of her work she had as yet marked success. Milne was keeping his pledge not to drink, and under the influence of her sunny presence and loving ways he was becoming a much better man. The home, too, changed quickly under the new reign. Cleanliness was no word for it under its present aspect. The little attic became spotless, the window shone, the walls were whitewashed, the boards were washed daily. Tom himself had also to submit to this cleaning process, and as far as his bodily comforts went, he had now nothing to complain of. His meals were well cooked, his bad leg comfortably dressed. Of all the three objects of her life, Mrs. Milne certainly spent most time and thought over Tom, and yet, strange to say, Tom was the only one of them all with whom she was not succeeding.

His father called Tom sulky; he could not understand how a child who had always been so neglected, who had always been alone, and to whom kind words and actions must be almost unknown, did not respond with his whole heart to the tenderness now poured out upon him. Tom's father felt very angry when he saw his downcast face, and would have been tempted to beat him had not his wife interfered. Tom's step-mother understood him far better than his own father. But still, even she was sorely puzzled to make out what ailed him. She saw that he was unhappy; that his poor little crooked mind was turning more and more every day from all wholesome and pleasant things; but not knowing where he went wrong, she found it impossible to set him right.

At last one day, thinking deeply, she hoped

she had found a clue. She remembered his distress when he heard of Spitfire's disappearance. She did not know anything about Spitfire, but she guessed that Tom must care for her. If she could find her again it might make the boy happy. Mrs. Milne would go to a great deal of trouble to achieve that object. Having washed up and made everything tidy, she told Tom one afternoon of her intention.

"I'm jest goin' out now to hear some'ot about that ere little gal, Spitfire you calls her, Tom, my dear."

Tom had been lying listlessly, not troubling himself to take an interest in anything.

Now for a brief moment, hope and life did fire his eyes, but only for a moment.

"Spitfire's dead," he said; "ye needn't trouble to find no Spitfire."

"I don't b'lieve a bit as she's dead," answered Mrs. Milne, cheerfully. "Anyhow, I'm going to have a look for her."

Then she went out and occupied her day in vain searchings and inquiries. Alas, no one knew anything of the missing child, and most people when closely questioned supposed that she must be dead. Tom's stepmother went home with a heavy heart.

But now, as the weather grew hotter, and Tom had no hope to cheer him, his disease began to take a more active form—the little boy became at last quite seriously ill. neighbours, who had neglected him before his stepmother arrived, began to pity and to suggest many remedies. Mrs. Milne, however, had a plan of her own; she would try what no one had ever yet tried to do for Tom-she would try to have him admitted into a children's hospital. Taking the right steps, she soon got an order for Tom, and in about a month after his father's second marriage the little sick boy found himself an inmate of a pleasant ward in one of those institutions which prove so large a blessing to many. He did not like the change; how could he, not knowing what was about to befall him?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ward in which Tom was placed was one of the largest in the hospital. The whole scene was new to the little boy, and when he had slightly got over the fit of sulks which oppressed him on his arrival, he looked around him with some interest. Down the long room were rows of little white cots, in each cot lay a child, and from all directions the sweet eyes of children were turned on Tom, who was the last arrival. He was not a shy child, and he returned their gaze fully and boldly, but when they smiled at him he did not dream of smiling back in return He was not at all happy enough to have reached so gracious a stage as yet. With one exception there was no child very ill in the ward, and the scene with the pleasant-looking nurses moving about was cheerful. It was quite evening when Tom came, and now the nurses were busy bringing little trays with supper, lighting gas, and making many preparations for the night. Tom watched it all, neither speaking nor smiling. When his own supper was brought to him, he received it without a remark. He looked a very disagreeable little boy indeed.

I have said that there was one child very ill in the ward. That child was in the cot nearest to Tom. After a time he began to notice this fact. He turned round and looked well at the cot and its occupant. He could not see very much—only a little head, with short, very black hair, pressed upon a pillow; the face was turned away from him. When the nurses approached this cot they trod softly, and looks of pity came over their countenances. Tom began to feel interested; he looked again and again at the little black head, his heart began to beat; a hope, vague, unintelligible, and yet there, began to take possession of him.

Night came on, and the children lay down. One by one their eyes were closed, and sleep came, with its healing and its blessing, to the sick little ones. Tom too lay down with the other children, but, unlike the others, he could not sleep. He kept again and again opening

his eyes to watch that little still child in the cot next to his own. The night nurse sat next the child, who slept on and on, lying all the time so motionless that it seemed almost impossible to believe that there was life in the little frame. Each time Tom looked up at the black head, he found his own sleep going further and further away, and more and more anxious, and yet hopeful, became his thoughts. At last his restlessness attracted the nurse, who came to him.

"Is there anything the matter?" she said.

"Please," said Tom, lifting his great hollow eyes to her face, "please is that sick little un' in that ere bed a little gal?"

"Yes, my dear."

Tom raised himself in his eagerness.

"And 'ave she been 'ere long?"

"Well, let me see, very nearly a month. She has been very ill indeed, but somehow, although she is so bad still, I have a little hope for her to-night."

"What wor her name, mar'm?"

"That I cannot tell you, my dear. She was brought in here quite insensible. She had been run over by some dray, or wagon, or something, and greatly hurt. It is the greatest wonder that she is alive so long. But now, my dear child, you must not talk; just shut your eyes and go to sleep like the other little children."

"Yes, I will, I will, mum," answered Tom, quite humbly, "only jest please tell me one thing—'ad that ere little sick gal as got run over, 'ad she a funny dress, werry short, and made o' carpet stuff?"

Why, my dear, you must know something of her. I am almost sure she was dressed something like that. I can find out certainly tomorrow. Do you know her, my dear?"

"Oh, yes! oh, yes!" answered Tom, and he burst into sudden tears. "I know 'er. Why it's Spitfire, it's my own darlin' Spitfire, and she ain't dead arter all."

CHAPTER IX.

THE nurse went back to the little cot and sat down once more by the sick child. She had again asked Tom to go to sleep, but Tom had not obeyed her. He could scarcely tell to his own heart what a tumult of hope and rejoicing had come to him in the fact that Spitfire was still alive. She had not died and gone away never to come back. All the dreadful unknown of unbelief seemed lifted from Tom's heart by this fact. All these weeks it had been pressing on him with the force and oppression of a nightmare; the fact that Spitfire-Spitfire, who herself had told him of "spirits bright"—had died, and found the country beyond the grave cold, dark, and dreary; far too cold and desolate to make it possible for her to come back with any tidings of good to Tom. How Tom had sighed for her return! But now the reason was explained; not in the dreadful way that he had

feared, but by the simple and happy fact that Spitfire was not dead at all. She had never crossed that narrow bridge which severs the living from the dead. She was still alive, and the future might still be good, and his stepmother's stories might be both pretty and true.

All night the deep sleep which had fallen on the sick child grew deeper and more sweet, and as the morning broke the nurse's anxious face became less anxious, and she turned to Tom, who had never closed his own eyes, with a smile. Almost at the same moment Spitfire awoke—her face was now towards Tom—she opened her big black eyes and looked at him without a trace of question or surprise.

- "Tom," she said, "there is arter all."
- "Wot?" said Tom.
- "Sperrits bright."
- "Oh! Spitfire, 'as ye been dead and come back? 'As yer really seen 'em?" asked Tom.
- "'Eaps and 'eaps on 'em, Tom," answered Spitfire, "Oh! they wor bright, them sperrits. I seed yer mother among 'em, Tom."
 - "Oh!" said Tom, with a gasp.
- "It's all quite true, Tom; and I said I'd come back," continued Spitfire.

"I believe ye," answered Tom.

* * * * *

Side by side in that pleasant hospital two little children got well. From the moment she awoke and saw Tom, Spitfire's danger was past, and the kind and clever doctors soon found out what really ailed Tom, and began to set him right. Side by side two little children learned the true story of "spirits bright," and of all other good and happy things. How Tom's eyes did shine, and how Spitfire nodded and winked with approbation, when the nurses and lady visitors told of all the good tidings of Christ's love. Mrs. Milne, too, when she came to visit them, repeated once again, and this time to believing ears, her message of gospel gold. How the children learned to love her during these days, and how dearly they loved one another l

When at last they were fit to leave the hospital, a great and pleasant surprise was in store for them, for Mrs. Milne had determined that Spitfire should never go back to her cruel step-mother. She took her home to live with herself and Tom. In that pleasant home how happy was her lot!

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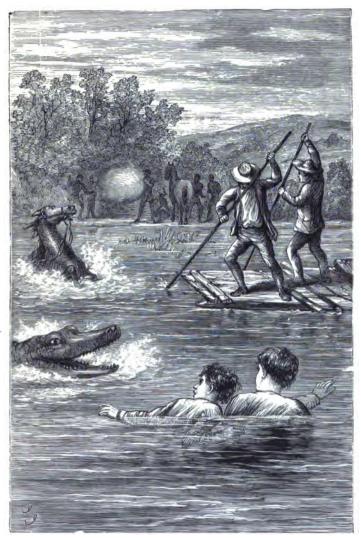
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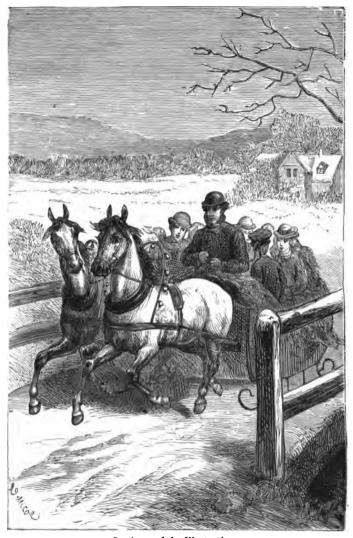
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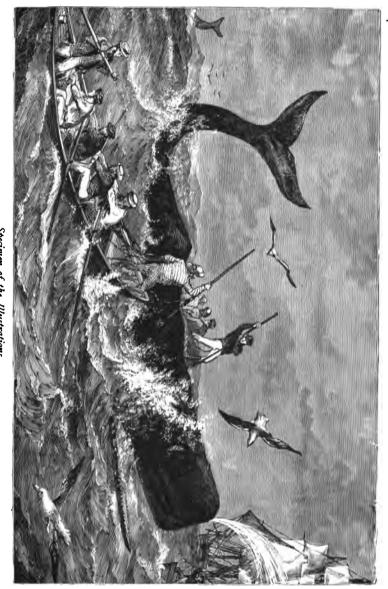
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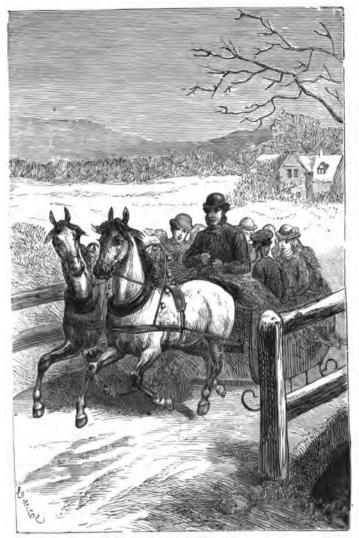
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